

# **Baptistic Theologies**

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## Editorial

Last year the Orthodox Faculty of the St Kliment of Ohrid University, Sofia, and the International Baptist Theological Seminary jointly hosted an international conference in Prague on the theme of “Christian Witness in the Orthodox context” (February 08-12 2009). The speakers addressed three focal points of the discussion: canonical territories, religious freedom and issues of proselytism as viewed by Orthodox churches and minority Christian communities in the Orthodox context. Other topics explored through conference presentations and discussions were issues of shared language, metaphors and spiritual roots of embodied Christian theologies; social ministries; Orthodox missional identities and the long-lasting effect of the millet system on the understanding of the contemporary Orthodox mission in the territories of the former Ottoman Empire. Contributions to the two issues of the second volume of *Baptistic Theologies* were solicited primarily but not exclusively from among the participants in this conference.

Our articles in the first of these two issues of this volume of the journal lead us on a journey of deepening contextualisation. We begin with an introductory overview from Emil Traytchev, dean of the Theological Faculty of St Clement of Ohrid in Sofia, on mission as *martyria*, reminding us of both the missional context and action of not only the Bulgarian church but many others under communism.

But, if mission is indeed *martyria*, Walter Sawatsky pertinently asks us what sort of witness we are offering in the contested space of Europe, and how encounters can either foster deeper understanding or lead to bitterness and division. Sawatsky does not want to deny the need for mission in the previously Christian countries of Europe, and both Dilian Nikolchev and Bozhidar Andonov examine this need in the context of the European Union and European integration. How much notice is taken of the foundational place of Christianity in the history of Europe, and can this be ignored today?

The following two articles look at the possibility of mission by and among Orthodox, starting with the Armenian theologian Petros Malakyan’s reflection on work for leadership training among lay people in two very different settings, Armenia and Ethiopia, two of the most ancient Christian nations in the world. Svetoslav Ribolov takes us back to Bulgaria and sets

the scene with both a historical and contemporary overview of the Bulgarian scene and its implications for mission.

Ribolov is perhaps more sanguine in his view of the welcome afforded to evangelicals in Bulgaria than our next two writers, who experience life in their country precisely as evangelicals. Both Viktor Kostov and Kamila Slavcheva stress the need for a far deeper commitment to religious freedom in this culturally Orthodox country.

Greg Nichols, a leading expert on evangelical revivalist Ivan Kargel, examines Kargel's role in developing Baptist communities in Bulgaria. In doing so, we are reminded that these and other Evangelical communities already have deep roots in the country. Petya Zareva, who is part of the Baptist community in Bulgaria, reflects on what the traditions can learn from each other.

Our journal is entitled *Baptistic Theologies*, so it is fitting that our last article, by Jim Purves, should be a baptistic theological reflection on some of the issues raised in the other articles. Purves argues that orthodoxy is not enough, if it is not combined with right action, right attitude to others and the right fire of the Holy Spirit burning within us. We hope that these articles, each expressing the particular perspective of the author, will provoke agreement, disagreement, interest and an increased desire to engage, each in her or his own way, in the call to bear witness to Christ our Lord, wherever we find ourselves.

**Doc. Dr Parush Parushev and Dr Tim Noble**

## 1

**Mission as Witness**

Emil Traytchev

It is a fact that one of the most important questions that Orthodox mission faces at the beginning of the twenty-first century is that of Christian mission in the Orthodox context.

Western Christians have tended to think of Orthodox Christians as somehow ‘non-missionary’. The twentieth century, after the First World War, has been a period of ‘ecumenical’ contact between Christians of different traditions. But the mid-twentieth century was the time when Orthodox mission was at its lowest ebb. After the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, Russia was virtually the only centre of Orthodox mission, and the Bolshevik revolution put an end to that.

D. J. Bosch in his book *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* concludes his chapter on the mission paradigm of the Eastern Church with the following assessment:

The church adapted to the existing world order, resulting in the Church and society penetrating and permeating each other. The role of religion – any religion – in society is that of both stabiliser and emancipator; it is both mythical and messianic. In the Eastern tradition the church tended to express the former of each of these pairs rather than the latter. The emphasis was on conservation and restoration, rather than on embarking on a journey into the unknown. The key words were ‘tradition’, ‘orthodoxy’, and the ‘Fathers’, and the church became the bulwark of right doctrine. Orthodox churches tended to become ingrown, excessively nationalistic, and without a concern for those outside. In particular, Platonic categories of thought all but destroyed primitive Christian eschatology. The church established itself in the world as an institute of almost exclusively other-worldly salvation.<sup>1</sup>

In the last few years missionaries from some Western Christian groups, mainly from the USA, have been pouring into Bulgaria and neighbouring countries. They have felt that God was calling them to bring Christ to the godless communist world. They ignored the fact that the gospel of Christ has been preached in Bulgaria for over 1000 years. That,

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<sup>1</sup> D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), pp. 212f.

they believe, is not the true gospel, and they urge Orthodox Christians to leave the Orthodox Church, which they say is 'idolatrous', and to join their sects. It was so bad at one point that it seemed the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe were a bit like the man who was travelling between Jerusalem and Jericho and got mugged.

However, the essence of Orthodoxy, vis-à-vis Western theology in its entirety, i.e. Catholic and Protestant, is even beyond such theological presuppositions. I would dare to say that it is a way of life, hence the importance of her liturgical tradition. The *lex orandi* has a privileged priority in the life of the Christian church. The *lex credendi* depends on the devotional experience and vision of the church, as G. Florovsky put it,<sup>2</sup> or more precisely on the authentic (i.e. liturgical) identity of the church. The heart of Orthodox liturgy is the Eucharist. It is solely in the Eucharist that the church becomes church in its fullest sense. Orthodox theology has been known to non-Orthodox as more consistent to Eucharistic ecclesiology, while, for example, in Roman Catholicism one puts more emphasis on universal ecclesiology.<sup>3</sup> After all, the real function of 'theology' is to be the critical conscience of the church.

Jesus Christ said, 'And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth'. The biblical understanding of mission (*apostole*) means to leave, to accept being in another cultural environment, to be a stranger. We must distinguish between apostolic mission and the pastoral efforts that the clergy undertake in our local churches. Pastoral efforts and renewal of Christian life are indeed very important. In many societies where an atheistic influence prevails, as now in Bulgaria, we have to be a witness (in Greek, *martyria*), to invite people who do not have faith to the church. However, spiritual edification within the church is not exactly a missionary effort. Missionary effort is about having the vocation to bring into the church that which is outside of it. In the beginning, we had a youthful enthusiasm for the meaning of the word 'mission'. Later, we discovered that these words were widely used. Then we decided to use rather the word *martyria*, 'witness', not 'mission'.

When we have to distinguish true mission from proselytism it is important to have in mind that proselytism uses all possible means (gifts, food, money and other privileges) to achieve an aim, to bring followers into

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<sup>2</sup> G. Florovsky, *The Elements of Liturgy* in G. Patelos, ed., *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement: Documents and Statements 1902-1975* (Geneva: World Council of Churches 1978), p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the influential contribution of J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: Saint Vladimir Seminary Press, 1985).



a concrete religious community. Sometimes this contravenes the dignity of the human person and of the gospel, and I believe it is really not sincere. What is not sincere—sincere both in purpose and sincere in ways of acting—cannot be Orthodox. For me proselytism starts when other means are used, instead of the gospel, in order to gain followers.

We do not have anxiety about statistics and followers. The Orthodox *martyria* must be a free witness of what we believe and what we have—a sharing of the gift that we have received. If others accept it, fine. If they do not, that is their own responsibility.

Orthodox mission consists in offering the treasure we have and leaving the other to decide whether he or she will take it or not. If the other wants to join the Orthodox Church, you will never say ‘No’. Our aim is to transmit the tradition of the gospel in all its fullness, remaining free from any anxiety to convert anyone. You cannot impose on anyone's freedom. You are there, you give your witness; you are a candle, lighted by paschal joy, and if the other wishes to take from your flame, then of course, you will not refuse him.

In Western society, it has never been forbidden to pray to God, to go to church; these things are taken for granted. Bulgaria passed through a very terrible persecution for 45 years: if you had the courage to express your faith you were sent into exile or to prison. Because of these 45 years, today Bulgaria is a mission field.

Here I insist on a theological understanding of mission: every person who is incorporated into the church, into the mystical body of Christ, bears a responsibility for the church. Every person has a vocation and, of course, he or she must see in his/her heart how this will be expressed and experienced.

There is the possibility today for everyone to do missionary work. Mission is not only for priests or monks. It is for everybody.

We know that the understanding of other faiths is an extremely important theological question: Is God present in them? I do not think that we can answer this question very quickly. Today we face two major theological problems. The first is ecclesiological, the complex problem of how we see other churches. The second is the understanding of other religions. Of course we accept that God has providence and interest in the whole world. We do not know clearly how this presence manifests itself.

We know clearly the sure way to follow for salvation. As far as others are concerned, we have the responsibility to pray and to give them our witness, but we cannot take from Him the final judgment and say now just how He would judge others. We must be a little more humble than some of our brothers who know everything about God and behave like spokesmen of God: 'God will act like this or that'. Let us accept that we do not know the whole mystery of God, and we do not know about His infinite love.

We must develop an understanding of other religions from an Orthodox point of view. We need to see this in the Trinitarian perspective and not only Christologically. In some Christian circles it happens that they see this in Christological terms only. The future of Christian mission means a radical shift to a 'new paradigm', away from 'Christocentric universalism' and towards a 'Trinitarian' understanding of the divine reality. For an understanding of mission, this means the abandonment of any effort at proselytising, not only among Christians of other denominations, but even among peoples of other religions. Dialogue is the new term which now runs parallel to, and in some cases in place of, the old missiological terminology.

Besides, when applied to mission a Trinitarian basis has had a tremendous effect in helping the church to avoid imperialist or confessionalist attitudes. Trinitarian theology points to the fact that God's involvement in history aims at drawing humanity and creation in general into communion with God's very life. God's covenant has always extended to other peoples, to the whole creation. The implications of this assertion for understanding mission are very important: mission does not aim primarily at the propagation or transmission of intellectual convictions, doctrines, moral commands, etc., but at the transmission of the life of communion that exists in God.<sup>4</sup> Theology in the Church has always tried to have a common language with the world, in order to explain the gospel in terms of a given culture. The problem in today's 'post-Christian era' lies in the fact that there is no more common language with the outside world.

**Doc Dr Emil Traytchev, Sofia, Bulgaria**

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. I. Bria, ed., *Go Forth in Peace. Orthodox Perspectives on Mission* (Geneva: World Council of Churches 1985), p. 3.

## 2

## Whose Mission in Whose Europe—What is Our Witness?

Walter Sawatsky

I need to offer a short explanation of why this paper developed differently, with a broader reflection on the patterns of reform and renewal within two millennia of Christian history, than the originally assigned title on Orthodox-Latin Christian interactions. Much of that subject was contained in my article on Orthodox-Evangelical Protestant dialogue on mission that appeared in August 2008 in the first issue of a new journal, *Acta Missiologiae*, which is a journal for reflection on missiological issues and mission practice in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> Allow me also a brief remark about the spirit in which I approached my topic. I have come to believe that as a historian and missiologist, I need to approach our embeddedness in Christian history, even when speaking from within my own Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, in tones of penitence for the ways we have fallen short from our stated ideals and for which we have much we need to live down. It is when we have realised, especially through the testing of the twentieth century, that when we as church have seemingly reached the edge of the abyss, whether we think of Gulag experiences, the church's inadequacy in the face of Holocaust, genocide, and ecological destruction, then we get to a 'nevertheless' of hope. I hope that a theology of penitence and of that 'nevertheless' is evident here; it is for me a crucial condition for dialogue today, both with the Christian 'other' and the 'other' faiths.

A dozen years ago there was renewed talk about the issue of proselytism and mission, raised this time by those within the Russian Orthodox Church who felt threatened by the inundation of Western missionaries, especially Roman Catholics from Poland and Evangelical Protestants primarily from North America. This was expressed in terms of an appeal to ecumenical statements of agreement from 1961 and 1970 (WCC). Unfortunately, many of the missionaries knew nothing about such agreements, nor were their supporting churches disposed to honour them, not holding membership in the WCC. One American missiological journal responded with articles by a prominent Pentecostal historian, a theological reflection by Miroslav Volf entitled 'Fishing in the Neighbour's Pond',

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Sawatsky, 'Orthodox-Evangelical Protestant Dialogue on Mission: Challenges and Shifting Options,' *Acta Missiologiae*, Volume 1 (2008), pp. 11-31.

with a response by Fr. Leonid Kishkovsky, ecumenical officer of the Orthodox Church in America.<sup>2</sup> That is, representative American Evangelical Protestants were in conversation with a respected Orthodox leader. Interestingly, it was also the time when enough Evangelical pastors and church members had been converting to Orthodoxy that it rated a news story on National Public Radio. Soon after, I organised a conference on proselytism and mission at my Mennonite seminary in order to have Mennonite missiologists ponder the issues, together with guest speakers such as Kishkovsky and Haddad from the Middle East Council of Churches.<sup>3</sup>

As the conversations progressed over two days, I was struck with the degree to which the culture of competition in mission in the USA was reflected in the assumptions of fellow Mennonite presenters, a contextual presumption with which Kishkovsky was fully conversant. When speaking about the Russian, Middle Eastern, Asian or even Latin American contexts, this climate of freedom of religious expression including widespread advertising for church ministries in the media, scarcely applied. I realised how many serious Christians and American congregations could not grasp the problem. At the same time, many took the view that deliberately to ‘fish in the other churches’ pond’ was wrong, but to bear witness to persons not practicing faith in a context where another Christian confession was dominant must be considered authentic mission, some further qualifying that if the requirements for Christian baptism were insufficient for establishing true conversion to Christ, then such persons too (even if technically church members) were part of the mission field to which the mission imperative applied.

These efforts at dialogue on proselytism did not result in much ongoing self-criticism of our mission policies and practices. In my work as editor of *Religion in Eastern Europe* we published a half-dozen articles or more on the topic of proselytism over the next several years, some emerging from a major study on the proselytism problem in the former Soviet Union and in the Balkans (funded by the Pew Foundation), which helped readers to better differentiate dissimilar contexts, between stated policy from church leaders and the actions of zealots in the church, and between theological understandings of the process of becoming Christian.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There were articles by David Kerr, Mel Robeck, Miroslav Volf, and Leonid Kishkovsky in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> See *Mission Focus: Annual Review*, Volume 7 (1998).

<sup>4</sup> Publications included a special issue of the *Emory Law Review* (1998); John Witte and Michael Bourdeaux, eds. *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls*, Religion & Human

In hindsight, it is now clear that the coordinated efforts of the Co-Mission movement have left a negative legacy. Its spokespersons, when in Russia, claimed they were sending thousands of teachers to assist in introducing a non-denominational curriculum for teaching ethics, but at the same time they were telling their supporters in America that these were missionaries sent to plant churches. When that contradiction became known it created a reaction among Russian Christians, both Orthodox and Baptist, resulting in a desire for such missionaries to go home.

I have chosen to entitle my remarks ‘Whose Mission in Whose Europe?’ That is shorthand for pointing to the fact that when considering ‘Witness in Orthodox Contexts’ we understand what the topic is about, yet we also wonder why it seems an absurdity. It seems to me the topic is an invitation to probe presuppositions that have been too easily held. In order to do so, I propose to back away from the immediate context, seeking some very broad comparisons and patterns from history which may make it easier to offer points of differentiation about the reality of mission in European Orthodox contexts today.

More than a decade ago I began offering a one-semester comprehensive history of Christianity in a global perspective course. In it specific themes are highlighted each week and presented in the form of an overview of a 2000 year story; one cannot help but see broad patterns rather than get lost in multiple details. When one seeks to conceptualise Christian history globally, certain broadly held presuppositions worthy of critique are more easily noticed.

To think historically is to look for indicators of change, to ask why there was such anxiety during periods of conflict, and to draw attention to surprising developments along the way. For example, there was great optimism among the mission specialists meeting in Edinburgh in 1910. John R. Mott’s closing address declared that the conference ‘is the beginning of the conquest’, by which he meant they could confidently organise their forces to achieve the evangelisation of the world in that generation.<sup>5</sup> Soon after came World War I when the government of one Christian nation interned the missionaries of another, as Andrew Walls put it. A large proportion of young males died in the trenches, many of whom

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Rights Series (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999); John Witte and Richard C. Martin, *Sharing the Book: Religious Perspectives on the Rights and Wrongs of Proselytism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Andrew Walls, ‘Afterword: Christian Mission in a Five-hundred-year Context’, in Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross, eds. *Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), pp. 195-199, p. 200. The phrase, ‘evangelization of the world in this generation’ had become the watchword of the Student Christian Volunteer Movement.

might have been mobilised for that evangelism task. By mid-century the extent of killing during World War II was making it the bloodiest century ever. There followed the end of most of the empires that had facilitated planning for global mission. What also followed was a drastic decline in Christian adherents in those sending countries. Nevertheless, a century later there is a worldwide Christian presence, and the worldwide spread of the gospel is unmistakable. Moreover, some of the most surprising Christian growth has come in places not even talked about in Edinburgh.<sup>6</sup>

## The Soul of Europe Debate

In May 2006 prominent representatives of the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches gathered in Vienna for a conference on the theme: 'Giving a Soul to Europe: The Mission and Responsibility of the Churches'. Patriarch Aleksii II declared that, 'it is an incontestable fact that European civilisation is founded upon Christian values'.<sup>7</sup> What he had in mind was the fact that 'concern for our neighbour, respect for human freedom, and tolerance of differences is the Christian message of love toward God and the person as the bearer of His image'.<sup>8</sup> He was followed by then Metropolitan Kirill (who was installed as Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia on 1 February 2009) who spoke at greater length about the threat to the culture of Europe, of which Russia considers itself a part. He stated that, 'secularism, the break with spiritual traditions, represents a great threat to the existence of European civilisation'. Both speakers used the phrase 'Western civilisation'. Since the debates over the absence of references to God in the new European Union Constitution began (2000), the Russian Orthodox Church had assigned Bishop Hilarion (Alfayev) to represent its interests for maintaining a specifically Christian European culture. Russian Orthodox anxiety was also triggered by the end of communist rule in 1991 and the subsequent search for a new vision for rebuilding society.

In missiological literature we now encounter three words that refer to the Christian role in society and culture: contextualisation, enculturation, and Christianisation. At the risk of simplifying, we might say that Evangelical Protestant missiologists have tended to expound the meaning of contextualisation, Roman Catholic thinkers in the southern hemisphere speak more often about enculturation, and the Orthodox speak of Christianisation. All of these refer to a slow process; all take the reality of culture as fundamental to Christian expression; but the differences by

<sup>6</sup> Summarized from Walls' article, pp. 193-197.

<sup>7</sup> From *Europaica Bulletin* #96 (May 11, 2006), posted on <http://orthodoxeurope.org/section/14.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

which Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox perceive the desired Christian role in society is evident by the code words they choose. The Catholic notion of enculturation conveys much more the image of a Christian church impacted by the culture and acting within it, whereas the Protestant contextualisation evokes a more selective adaptation to culture or to context, not quite fitting in, contextualising for strategy's sake more than for the sake of claiming the culture for Christ. That latter notion is invoked more by the word Christianisation. There is the modest and humble meaning that Anthony Ugolnik stressed, saying that the Orthodox do not wish to dominate and control the culture; rather they wish to have space within it, to image forth Christ, and for Christianity to permeate the culture so that it starts to become more Christian.<sup>9</sup> A more aggressive Christianisation notion may have been behind the announced Russian Orthodox 33-year plan to focus on the life of Christ with annual themes, so that all sectors of society engage Christian thinking through conferences or the media. That initiative includes advocates who seek to prevent non-Orthodox Christians from having similar access to the media.

The Soul of Europe conference spoke of Christianisation and secularisation. The pre-supposition was that there had been a long process of Christianisation, not just the way in which Western Christendom had functioned, but that Byzantium, with its centre in Constantinople, had also shaped European culture. Secularisation was seen as an undercutting of that holistic culture. As a result, the grounded reasons for respect of human dignity, for freedom and tolerance of difference, would lose their religious anchoring, and society would become atomised, would be given over to rampant materialism and exploitation. There have also been voices urging more rapprochement between Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy in order to shore up Christian values. For some, liberal Protestantism is seen as a factor for neutralising basic human values; it takes but a step further to become a seculariser who no longer needs any God reference.<sup>10</sup> That is, the widespread desire for a secular European community of tolerance and mutual respect was predicated on a rejection of the Christian churches as too much the source of conflict.

The common religious categories applied to Christian Europe now need to include at least four major Christian groupings, as well as the presence of Islam in Europe. Those are Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and

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<sup>9</sup> See his extended comments in Anthony Ugolnik, *The Illuminating Icon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> That is the explicit argument of Aidan Nichols in *Christendom Awake: On Reenergizing the Church in Culture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000).

neo-Protestant. The inter-actions between these broadly defined Christian communities remain troubled. Since 1970 the Evangelicals or neo-Protestants have become a distinct cultural power factor. Globally speaking, to follow David Barrett, there are over 283 'global communions', all claiming the lordship of Christ, without many of them truly taking each other seriously. The cross-confessional role of the charismatic movement probably deserves a place in the list of influential religious groupings.<sup>11</sup> Decades ago an American theologian spoke of the 'Protestantising factor' as worthy of note for making sense of American cultural history. I would like to apply the term 'Protestantising factor' more globally as a device for helping us think about the nature of religious cultures.

As we know, the word 'Protestant' was a pejorative term applied not just to Martin Luther's protest against indulgences, or Zwingli's protesting the veneration of images and statues in the Zurich Grossmuenster. All the Reformation traditions and the variety of reformist ideas within them were lumped together under the reactive word 'Protestant'. I propose to apply a more positive concept to this 'Protestantising factor' by saying it refers to the historical fact that the Christian church is constantly in a process of renewal or revival. The elite (clergy and theologians) have regularly attacked the faithful, the laity, for failing to measure up to the demands of Christ, a fairly consistent Protestantising factor in Christian history. Active laity, often also minority or marginalised groups, played a Protestantising role by pointing to the shortcomings of the elite—the priests, the bishops, and even the pope. We think for example of the Cluniac reformers who worked their influence through until they had fostered the split between East and West in 1054. In an interesting turn, soon after one of their own number became pope.

Allow me to return again to the broad patterns that a global perspective on Christian history offers. Soon after the time of the apostles, Christian witness had extended to 'all the ends of the earth'. But 'to the ends of the earth' has been a shifting target for Christian mission. One watershed was reached between 680 and 750 when Christianity encircled the entire Mediterranean Sea with strong churches in all regions. At its head were the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the Roman Pope, the Patriarch or Pope of Alexandria and the Patriarch of Antioch in Syria. Judith Herrin's widely discussed book on the *Formation of Christendom*

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<sup>11</sup> For a handy summary of the activities of the annual meeting of a Conference of World Communions (23 are active, 50 in full sympathy), see 'Christian World Communions: Five Overviews of Global Christianity, AD 1800-2025,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 33/1 (January, 2009), pp 25-32. The global chart (p. 32) reports 254 million Orthodox, 391 million Protestant +84 million Anglicans, 366 million Independents and 1.134 billion Roman Catholics.



taught us to notice that by the time of Charlemagne's proclamation of the Holy Roman Empire in 800, that same Mediterranean world of Christianity had become a competition between three claimants for 'to the ends of the earth': the Byzantine world, versus the Roman papacy, versus Islam.<sup>12</sup>

Ever since that period, the Christian context has never been without an encroaching Islamic context, and the subsequent history of various parts of Christianity have been the story of survival (at times flourishing) under Islamic rule, a pushing back of Islam by means of crusades to recover holy land, and a steady growth of Islam globally, often by means of permeation of Christian worlds, until the dominant culture became anxious. We must also note that even if the notion of 'canonical territory' as used by Patriarch Kirill still seems a modern novelty, nevertheless Catholics, Protestants, and even Evangelicals have long shared with the Orthodox a notion of holy land to be claimed around Jerusalem.

The 'ends of the earth' target continued to move, however. Around 1500 Christianity learned to think of inhabiting a globe, not just a flat world having ends from which to fall. By then the Syriac Christians who had numbered many millions and stretched as far east as China and India, had been drastically decimated, but Orthodox Christians (outside of Islamic territories), Roman Catholics, and Protestants engaged in active mission so that it was soon possible to speak of Christian churches around the globe, most of them linked to the heritage of those churches from Europe—Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox. The last 500 years of Christian history have been the story of some major transformations. Andrew Walls recently spoke of a 400-year 'Great European Migration' which has now been followed by a 'great reverse migration'.<sup>13</sup> That is, immigrants from Europe re-populated North and South America and brought over many Africans as slaves to the Americas. Immigration of the peoples of Asia added their number to the mix in the Americas, Australia, southern Africa, and Oceania. This vast people movement process, Walls claims, made new nations possible, new nations which, in the main, adopted the languages and cultures of Europe. The great European migration enabled the Great Powers of Europe to redraw patterns of world trade to their advantage, and that steady advance in dominance of the global economy made possible the global networks of empire for which the nineteenth century was especially noted. Walls adds that the Muslim territory to the south and east of

<sup>12</sup> Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). There are ways in which her more recent book, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) extends the argument of push-pull factors of Christianisation through 1453.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Walls, 'Afterword: Christian Mission in a Five-hundred-year Context', pp. 195-199.

European Christendom evolved in mirror image fashion, thus strengthening 'the identification of faith with territory'.<sup>14</sup>

In another essay by Gerald Pillay, in that same book on mission in the twenty-first century, there are further crucial observations of the patterns of Christian globalisation worth naming. Pillay points out how the cathedral schools were the forerunners of the universities in shaping the culture of Europe into a Christian one. Even the Enlightenment era, so often charged with the anti-Christian spirit of the famous French *philosophes*, had 'some devout Christians at its helm'.<sup>15</sup> Even the minority persecuted Christian communities played creative roles in shaping the Christian culture of Europe. Pillay finds that last point vital, since he suggests that even in a post-Christendom Europe and post-Christian world, that long European history of marginalisation and persecution now provides a pattern for a link to 'living Christian minority faiths across cultures and continents' in the coming century.<sup>16</sup> Schools founded by Christian convictions were of the type that was open to those in disadvantaged classes. These schools placed high value on moral vigour and academic excellence, so their role was central to Christian mission everywhere when seen as something more than an attempt at salvation of individual souls by the quickest method.

### **How do concepts of mission change societal understandings?**

We have returned more explicitly in post-1950s missiology to an emphasis on *missio Dei*. The answer to the question, 'whose mission is it?' is 'it is God's mission'. This helped make possible a greater sensitivity to culture and society and Christianity's potential role in it. Some recent ruminations

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 195

<sup>15</sup> Gerald Pillay, 'Education as Mission: Perspectives on Some New Opportunities,' in Walls and Ross, p. 166.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 167. In a major historical article that appeared since this paper was presented (A. G. Roeber, 'The Waters of Rebirth: The Eighteenth Century and Transoceanic Protestant Christianity', *Church History*, Vol. 79, No. 1 [March 2010] pp. 40-76), the author describes how a common self-understanding of a sixteenth-century origin Protestant (Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican and Anabaptist, as well as Hussite) had been the claim to be 'a true, ancient, apostolic, episcopal church' and seeking Orthodox affirmation of this in order to show the Roman Church as having strayed. That self-understanding changed, however, so that after 1740, 'a new understanding of evangelical Protestantism took shape, intensified holiness and the renewal of the individual and society would receive increased attention; the focus on the image and likeness of God, would not' (p. 57). The long-term result was 'a more undenominational Protestant self-understanding... emphasizing biblical authority, experiential, individual conversion' that Roeber argued marked the 'death of the European Protestantism created by the Reformation' (p. 76) in favour of a global Evangelicalism. It was these events around 1740, where the tiny, newly missionary-oriented Moravian Brethren unsuccessfully sought recognition, that Roeber used to show how the old self-understanding was no more, and how Moravian Pietist features became the subsequent Protestantising factors (my label) for the renewal movements in East and West Europe, and indeed globally.

by Lamin Sanneh underline the distinctive way in which God's mission has proceeded.<sup>17</sup> For example, Christianity is the only major religion whose followers do not speak the language of the founder. There still are a million or more Syriac/Aramaic speaking believers in the world, who read the sacred text the way Jesus spoke it. Most of us do not even know about that group and the way the original text is still used. This is because it remains true that the translation of Holy Scripture into the local vernacular has been an early mission task in each new mission field. Indeed, to highlight a few more of Sanneh's observations, not only do most Christians not worship in the language of Jesus or of the Jews, Christianity from the beginning has had no homeland. That was quite in contrast to the idea of territoriality of Israel. The later territorial divisions of the patriarchates were administrative in purpose; not everyone within a diocese or patriarchate was Christian, so later ideas of Christian territory are a stretch. The languages for translation as Christianity spread were the languages of the people, not the elite. For example, in India local languages, not Sanskrit became vehicles for Holy Scripture. Even Latin, so criticized for years as standing between Roman Catholics and their understanding of worship services, started out as an easily understood vernacular. These observations are not new, once we are reminded of them, but they underline that the Christian God is a God whose name can be translated. God is always seeking a relationship with God's creatures and seeks to be known to them in their idioms. There too, the vulnerability of the incarnation seems an ever greater risk: to translate God into human terms.

Earlier I noted that between neo-Protestants and Orthodox there is a significant difference in the understanding of salvation (soteriology). I am reminded of a meeting held in Chicago in the early 1990s between American Evangelical Protestants and Orthodox, which included the then Russian Orthodox bishop in Britain. At one point Mark Elliott, the host and director of the East/West Institute connected to Wheaton College, asked outright whether the bishop recognised the need for an individual experience of conversion, of being born again as Jesus put it to Nicodemus in John 3. The bishop could easily have said 'Of course', but chose to tell his own experience of personal faith. The listeners were drawn into a story of many events and experiences through which his steps toward God developed; including thereafter the probing of what quality of faith was needed when church leaders were pressured to restrict church life and witness, as had so often been true in the 1960s when he was in seminary.

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<sup>17</sup> Drawn from personal notes taken from Lamin Sanneh's keynote address at a conference on 'Resisting Mission' held at the University of Chicago Divinity School, 23 January 2009.

A fellow seminarian was Gleb Yakunin, whom he still counts as a friend 30 years later. When the statute of the Russian Orthodox Church was to be revised, whereby the priest no longer would have any legal standing as leader of the parish, but merely someone hired for religious services by a *dvadtsatka* (a council whose members need not even be practising Christians), and the new Patriarch Pimen submitted to atheist state demands, Gleb Yakunin wrote a letter of protest which was circulated and even handed to a foreigner to make it known in the West. 'That was not my way', the bishop said, 'Gleb was more the personality type who spoke out against what he thought was wrong. All I did was help circulate what he wrote and get it to the West'. As he kept on with his autobiography, and the type of persons who came to him to help them through their doubts, no one listening had any more questions about the depth and sustaining power of his Christian faith, about the legitimacy of his baptism.

Don Fairbairn has also drawn attention to these soteriology differences. When he first started out as a seminary graduate in the early 1990s teaching at a theological school in Ukraine, he stressed the importance of Reformed theology. He had been dismissive of the faith of Orthodox who lacked an emphasis on being born again. Years later, having completed his doctorate, he came to see things differently, and published a fine study of Eastern Orthodox theology. When Glanzer's book assessing the efforts of Co-Mission came out, he wrote a long review essay for *Religion in Eastern Europe*. Here is a key line from it. The new Russian converts, whether they realised it or not, 'were culturally and religiously predisposed to understand spiritual ideas within the framework of a journey toward God, a forward-looking spirituality'.<sup>18</sup> Earlier Fairbairn had pointed out that Protestants tended toward a 'backward-looking spirituality' by placing major focus on 'the changes that take place in a believer at the beginning of faith, the moment of conversion... using terms such as adoption, regeneration, remission of sins, redemption, and reception of the Holy Spirit, as well as justification... the moment when faith begins is the crucial moment in one's spiritual life'.<sup>19</sup> Orthodoxy, in contrast, 'focuses not on the beginning of faith, but on the end, the goal... the time at the end of history when believers will be fully united to Christ, fully brought into the heavenly kingdom'.<sup>20</sup> In short, that difference in soteriological understanding also encompassed differentiated ways of speaking and teaching about holiness and sanctification.

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<sup>18</sup> Donald Fairbairn, 'Book Review: Glanzer, Perry L. *The Quest for Russia's Soul: Evangelicals and Moral Education in Post-Communist Russia* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2002).' *Religion in Eastern Europe*, XXIII, No 5 (October 2003), pp. 51-58.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

It may be worth pointing out that the highly individuated understanding of being ‘born again’ post-dated Martin Luther’s Reformation emphasis on justification by faith alone by several centuries. We must realise that the Reformation in Western Europe itself was an expression of what is often called the modernity project, or the 500-year story of Humanism, of an ever growing pre-occupation with the nature of the human being. The rise of democracy is an element of that process, including the ever more participatory or democratic styles in which church life was organised and functioned. That is a quick way of saying that contrasting Orthodox with neo-Protestant as theologically distinct traditions provides some insight, but the history of changing societal contexts may be the more major factor impacting all traditions.

Recent scholars have been drawing attention to the fact that an indigenous Slavic Evangelical movement, not just missionaries making converts from abroad, accounts for the continued growth of the Evangelicals, because they represent a manifestation of that democratising impulse and the related need for more modern church structures. That accounts for conversion narratives of such Evangelicals who show great reluctance in leaving Orthodoxy because of the strengths they saw in that tradition, but in the end were drawn to a more democratic church.<sup>21</sup> Not only have various Evangelical church traditions thereafter encountered resistance in their ranks when their leaders in turn became too authoritarian; modern Russian Orthodoxy itself keeps adapting to and resisting elements of those societal democratic impulses.

## **Differentiating Orthodox Contexts**

It may be a bit late within this paper to point out that there is no one singular ‘Orthodox context’. First, within that area of Slavic Europe in which Orthodox Christianity functioned as bearer of culture, as Yeltsin’s government thought of it, there were and now are great differences. We think, for example, of the Russian heartland around Moscow and extending southeast less than a thousand kilometres where cupolas long dotted the terrain; or the earlier times of Kievan Rus when everyone attended the liturgy which went on for hours. Even though the Orthodox Church and its dioceses now extend to central Asia and all of Siberia, nowhere does its spiritual influence cover the territory. The priests in Tashkent, Almaty, and Dushanbe, to select merely those in large cities, feel themselves at a far distance and cut off from fellow priests. All about them are more obvious

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<sup>21</sup> Several early chapters in Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005) offer such conversion narratives.

manifestations of what is left of an earlier Islamic past, and of the rather successful impact of outright atheist secularisation. The Orthodox Churches of Eastern Europe, such as those in Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia easily recall a past of subjection to Ottoman Muslim rule, the pressures to abandon the Christian faith for an easier life as converted Muslims in the growing Dar Al Islam.

So the modern recovery story of those churches has involved an intertwining of nationhood formation as an Orthodox people rejecting Islam and rejecting any threats of reform from within. Yet the Protestantising influences were everywhere—part of the context for an enfeebled church restored to life. Protestant communities arose, usually as a mixture of the indigenous emergence of free-church sectarians such as Baptists, Evangelical Christians, Methodists or other lay initiatives within Orthodoxy reacting against what Florovsky called the pseudo-morphosis of Orthodoxy under the Ottomans and the influence from West European neo-Protestant missionary activity. Such minority churches persisted and remain influential in post-communism. Nor should it be forgotten that the Marxist option had its pre-history before 1917 or 1948, that is, before it came to power in the guise of ruling Communist parties. Marx and Engels had already pointed to the Reformation era radicals as positive forerunners, but who needed to unlearn their religiosity to keep step with history after 1848. In places as diverse as Moscow, Sofia, Prague and Belgrade Marxist leaders differentiated between Orthodoxy as a religious institution resisting reform or renovation, and the Protestants or neo-Protestants whose social ethics and skills in democratic action they hoped to manipulate toward their ideal of a classless society freed from religious superstition. That is, negotiating the way toward modernity included a plurality of Christian options as well as the Marxist one, and the key persons seeking dialogue during the Prague Spring of 1968, for example, struggled to confront those commonalities and differences. Then the Marxist idealists were silenced by Soviet and Warsaw Pact rulers who cared only about the facade of communist uniformity.

Still another important differentiation relates to the Uniate story. The official conflicts and concords between Catholic and Orthodox leaders date back to at least 1598 in Brest, and to Florence in 1437, but essentially since 1054 cultural differences between the Byzantine East and the Roman West have been a leitmotif, especially in what we now call western Ukraine.<sup>22</sup> As

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<sup>22</sup> For more detail on the current implications of the tensions between Catholics and Orthodox surrounding Uniatism, see Walter Sawatsky, 'Teaching about the Other—Inter-church Dialogue for Russian/Ukrainian Christianity', in Ines Angeli Murzaku, ed. *Quo Vadis Eastern Europe? Religion, State Society after the Fall of Communism* (Bologna: University of Bologna Press, 2008).

some of the studies on proselytism discovered, Ukraine had been a multi-confessional society for centuries. This fact makes it more difficult for modern Ukraine to sustain a claim that to be Ukrainian is to be Orthodox than for Russia to make that claim in the face of contradictory statistics. Today in Ukraine not only is the Eastern Rite Catholic (or Greek Catholic) Church predominant in western Ukraine, its energy and organisation gives it a stronger profile than does the Orthodox Church of the Russian Patriarchate, the largest of the four competing Orthodox jurisdictions. Further, the Evangelical Christian Baptist Union is currently rated as the fourth largest organised church. So Ukraine is a rather unique ‘Orthodox context’.

When we turn to Orthodoxy around the world in the twentieth century, the contextual differences are truly profound, and context has indeed affected the face of Orthodoxy there. Parush Parushev’s published analysis of the adaptations to context for Russian and Greek Orthodox churches over several centuries, and of how the face of both Greek and Russian Orthodox churches changed in the American Diaspora, an essentially Protestant context, raises many points to ponder.<sup>23</sup> In the nearly two decades that the WCC-sponsored inter-Orthodox discourse on mission proceeded, the missiologists grouped Orthodox mission thinking and praxis into three major contexts: mission within Islamic contexts (all of the Middle East, Turkey, and earlier a large part of Eastern Europe), mission in communist contexts, and mission in the Diaspora.<sup>24</sup> The spread of people in the great migrations of the past half millennium included many Orthodox Christians, now settled not only in North and South America, but also parts of Africa, Australia and Asia. Russian Orthodox mission activity before 1917 helped account for the existence of Korean, Japanese and even a Chinese Orthodox church, with essentially no one of Russian origin among them; as well as the Aleutian Orthodox Church in Alaska. Orthodoxy enculturated, contextualised, or as a Christianising factor, are all applicable descriptors.

Were we to include the Syriac Orthodox traditions who have so long lived as minority communities not only in modern day Iraq, Iran, and northern Africa, but also as Diaspora communities in dozens of West

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<sup>23</sup> Parush R. Parushev, ‘Narrative Paradigms of Emergence’, *Religion in Eastern Europe*, XXV, 2, (May 2005), pp. 1-39.

<sup>24</sup> The gatherings from 1978 through 1996 were reported in Ion Bria, ed, *Martyria/Mission. The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today* (Geneva: WCC, 1980); Ion Bria, ed., *Go Forth in Peace. Orthodox Perspectives on Mission* (Geneva: WCC, 1986); George Lemopoulos, ed., *Your Will be Done in Mission. Orthodoxy in Mission* (Geneva: WCC, 1989); Ion Bria, ed., *The Liturgy after the Liturgy. Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC, 1996).

European and American states, then ‘mission in Orthodox contexts’ tends to evoke both the image of profound diversity of setting within which Orthodox Christians have been living, but also their quite remarkable missionary outreach.<sup>25</sup> Not the least of which is the inner transformation when American Evangelicals converted to Orthodoxy, at first as a missionary division of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, then integrated into it, even as other Protestants and Evangelical Protestants found their way into the Orthodox Church in America and became leading priests and professors.

### **A 500-year story of the Protestantising factor**

In too much of the teaching on Reformation beginnings for seminarians from the Reformation-origin churches, there is a built-in bias to show that one’s own Reformation was more thorough, more radical, and more theological than were the other options. This is understandable, in part, if one considers the vulnerability of such denominations in an era when denominations are fragmenting, but it is counter to the way Reformation research today, and even much ecumenical dialogue between those traditions has been moving. A good illustration is a book by Scott Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard. The Reformation Agendas of Christianization*,<sup>26</sup> which extends an argument he made earlier, that all the reformers were seeking to ‘re-root’ the faith, based on what they sensed was lacking. By noting the change agendas of the entire sixteenth century Reformation movements, the church traditions that have resulted from them would benefit greatly if they would learn to appreciate and appropriate what the other traditions were emphasising in those early days.

At the time of the beginnings of these various traditions, the new followers were too worried about a particular reformer’s shortcomings, or that some were too radical and therefore threatened the chances for widespread change. Whether they were right in their mutual anxieties matters less now than the fact that the creative renewal energies have continued to enrich church life to the present—a long term impact of the Protestantising factor. In my own circles, therefore, I worry about too narrow a focus on Anabaptism, even selecting only a few elements from one region and making them normative, while failing to notice the

<sup>25</sup> See the statistics and brief analysis in the volumes by Sebastian P. Brock, *The Hidden Pearl. The Syrian Orthodox Church and its Ancient Aramaic Heritage*. 3 volumes: 1. The Ancient Aramaic Heritage. 2. The Heirs of the Ancient Aramaic Heritage, 3. At the Turn of the Third Millennium (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) which accompanied a 3-part video series titled *The Hidden Pearl*.

<sup>26</sup> Scott H. Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard. The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).



dynamism in sister Reformation traditions, even in those that once persecuted the Anabaptists.

The Protestantising factor of the sixteenth century Reformation had great influence, including within Roman Catholicism and within Russian Orthodoxy of the time (even if the Protestantisers were long suppressed). However, the failures of the Reformation were obvious enough that by the eighteenth century a widespread Pietist Reformation was in essence seeking to reform the reformers. Pietism was an active force within all parts of the Reformed tradition in continental Europe, though its emphasis varied from Switzerland to the Netherlands to the marginalised churches in Silesia and Eastern Europe. Lutheran Pietism also bore a different face in northern and southern German principalities. Catholic Pietism was evident in France; its influence out of Wuertemburg was felt as far away as Odessa and St Petersburg. Orthodox Pietism resulted in the publication of the *Philokalia* in Russian translation, was fostered by Labzin's journal, shaped the design of the entire theological school reform during the era of Tsar Alexander I, and continued to permeate the sermons of Metropolitan Filaret (Drozdov). What they all had in common was a greater attention to the lived spirituality of the believers and a heightened concern for seeking Christian fellowship across confessional boundaries. This was a proto-ecumenical, or Christian unity, movement.

Sometimes the Pietist Reformation refers to a period between 1710 and 1740 that also corresponds with the Awakening in Britain and the rise of Methodism. Sometimes a further wave of Pietism that was more noticeable in the Russian Orthodox world of the early nineteenth century is thought of as a third Reformation phase. Here I choose to highlight specific Protestantising factors of nineteenth century continental Europe as the rise of neo-Protestantism. If that earlier eighteenth century phase resulted in new theological schools to challenge the old universities, and new published literature of a more devotional character, those elements continued into the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> But the neo-Protestant era was also

characterised by organisation building for fostering spiritual renewal. Most important was the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1803, with a long period of influence by the Quakers. It was the most

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<sup>27</sup> The literature on Pietism is vast and growing. My own dissertation focus on Golitsyn is already more than 30 years old, but those wanting a quick introduction in English might check W. R. Ward, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and his earlier *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). The literature on Orthodox and Catholic Pietist movements is more diverse.

prominent of what soon became over a hundred voluntary societies—an organisation of the like-minded to achieve specified ends. The BFBS, for example, was committed to producing and distributing Bibles in the vernacular without any confessionally-shaped commentary. By adding the word ‘foreign’ the BFBS signalled its missionary intent—Bibles should be the foundational means of witness everywhere.

As we know, the first daughter society was the Russian Bible Society (1813-1826), whose leadership included Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed and other clerics. The president, Alexander Golitsyn, was the Tsar’s de facto prime minister, overseeing a dual ministry of all religious matters and the entire emerging educational program. As a side note, he even headed the new post office. Numerous voluntary societies were spun off to foster reading, to organise prison visitations, to foster the Lancaster school model, and other charitable activities. That was also the pattern across western and south-eastern Europe. During the nineteenth century Eastern Europe experienced the formation of Macedonian-speaking Methodists, Serbian Methodists and Baptists, etc. Indeed, depending on the confessional membership of the Bible Society colporteur who came around, sold Bibles, helped organise Bible study clubs, and helped seekers experience conversion and therefore even baptism—that process accounts for an almost inadvertent emergence of Free Church denominations, because that was the denominational orientation the Bible agent knew. In other cases, that Bible reading phenomenon resulted in the Lord’s Army in Romania as an Orthodox Protestantising factor, or in the Catholic Focolare organisations in Italy and much of Austro-Hungarian Empire-dominated Eastern Europe as the Protestantising factor.

### **Mission as a Protestantising factor in post-communist Europe**

During the grand era of global mission by Protestants and Catholics, as it is usually told in the missiology books, Europe was not thought to be a mission field. So we continue to debate, ‘When did a consciousness emerge that Europe, too, was a region for mission?’ That Europe was never fully Christianised, or is no longer Christianised, are common arguments in this debate. By the 1970s the ecumenical world generally agreed on mission to and within six continents (now including Europe). The changed context of the EU, the post-Communist world, and the ‘reverse migration’ to Europe bringing Christians from elsewhere as well as many Muslims, all evoked new calls to mission in Europe.

We have noted both the major missionary enthusiasm for Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union regions after 1990, which peaked by

1997, and the renewed concerns about proselytism, here defined as ‘fishing in the neighbour’s pond’. My intent with these broader comparisons is to offer the category of the Protestantising factor as a more useful category for conversing together on mission in context. That Protestantising factor draws primary attention to the dynamics of social change. It draws attention to the desires, expressed at first usually by a minority of the people for a more dynamic Christian faith. Its precise agenda for change is often micro-situational, until like-minded persons and groups find enough in common to organise to mobilise for change. Our task, when thinking of mission, is to offer wisdom to the enthusiasts, to help the anxious get a better reading of the situation, and to bring our minds together in critique. For missiologists must always ask, ‘Is it truly part of the *missio Dei*, or is it driven too much by ideas and spirits difficult to reconcile with what Scripture, tradition, reason and experience have been teaching the body of Christ so far?’

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## 3

## European Integration: Challenges and Perspectives before the Orthodox Church

Dilian Nikolchev

Speaking of the Orthodox Church and its mission in united Europe, I would like to start by mentioning the words of His Eminence the late Archbishop of Athens Hristodoulos (1939-2008) that, 'Europe is important to us because we are European citizens but mostly because we are Christians. Certainly Christianity is not European, but Europe is Christian'.<sup>1</sup> I have chosen a subject which is of basic importance to all of us, and which also could be entitled 'The Role of Religion within a Changing Europe'. It is of particular importance if the question arises of the significance of Orthodox Christians and the local Orthodox churches in a united Europe within the specific conditions of the European Union (EU).

In analyzing a united Europe from political and religious points of view, we shall consider that some of the founding fathers of the EU, such as Konrad Adenauer and Alcide De Gasperi, did share a vision of the truly Christian origin of Europe as it concerns a united Europe. An 'incarnation' of the 'soul' of Europe is a phrase invented by some Orthodox theologians to explain the role of Christianity within the Old Continent.<sup>2</sup> The latter phrase is considered part of the political and social vision of the European elite. Particularly, the Orthodox Church has a significant and important part in that cultural and political process. With its 300 million believers in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East and also in the New World, the Orthodox Church is a uniting and stabilising factor, but also a significant component of the continuing efforts for creating a new European reality, embracing both Eastern and Western Christian cultures and traditions of the continent.<sup>3</sup> That process still continues.

Even before the admittance of the new member-countries into the EU in 2004, Mr Romano Prodi, a former Italian prime minister and the then chairman of the European Commission, while meeting with Eastern Orthodox clergymen in Brussels, pointed out that the new enlargement to

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<sup>1</sup> Quotation from a speech by Archbishop Hristodoulos entitled "Αρχές και αξίες της Ευρώπης" [European principles and values], given at a congress held in Athens, Greece, in January 2001. The text was published the same month on the official web-page of the Archbishopric of Athens: <http://www.ecclesia.gr>, quoted in: *Bogoslovska Misal* [Theological thought], Volumes 1-4 (2007), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos in some of his speeches and statements.

<sup>3</sup> Patriarch Bartholomeos, "Patriarchal speech," *Mirna* [Peaceful], No. 27 (2006), p. 49.

the East would join the populations of the Eastern Orthodox tradition to the family of European nations (which until then consisted only of Western Europe and the two largest Western European confessional traditions—Roman Catholicism and Protestantism). That act, according to Mr Prodi was expected to enrich and complete the unity and the diversity of the general European culture. This complete unity of ‘Greater Europe’ has resulted in the re-establishment of the political commonwealth of the European multitudes and nations with their own cultural and religious tradition, and apparently these share the general and fundamental European civilising principals and values. Actually, through the full membership of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the countries with sizable traditional Eastern Orthodox communities, and the EU countries with compact Christian Orthodox denominations such as Cyprus, Greece and Finland, the Orthodox Christian presence has considerably increased and already forms the third branch of the common Christian tradition in Europe—Eastern Orthodoxy.

Since Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU on 1 January 2007, Eastern Orthodoxy represented by the local Orthodox churches has constituted a more consolidated and numerically strong ecclesiastical community (with a population of more than 40 million Orthodox) within the borders of the newly expanded Europe. As a result of that apparently new political, legal, cultural and religious diocesan situation in the context of European integration, a large number of serious questions have arisen concerning Eastern Orthodoxy in the European Union and the presence of different local Orthodox churches in the common European cultural space.<sup>4</sup>

The challenges and perspectives that the Orthodox Church is expected to meet after the enlargement of the European Union might be considered as having four main dimensions:

1. The aspect of the individual right of confession and religious freedom;
2. The aspect of the institutional freedom of religion as far as treatment of religious communities and their religious institutions;
3. The aspect of practising institutional settlement in the EU of the Orthodox Church as a whole, and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in particular, on one hand, and the local autocephalous church's

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<sup>4</sup> K. Nushev and D. Nikolchev, ‘Svobodata na veroizpovedaniata i Bulgarskata Pravoslana Tsarkva – predizvikatelstva i perspektivi v konteksta na evroitegratsijata’ [Freedom of religion and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church: Challenges and perspectives in the context of European integration], in *Prisaidinjaveto na Bulgaria kam Evropejsjija Sajuz – predizvikatelstva, problemi, prespektivi* [Accession of Bulgaria to the European Union: Challenges, problems and perspectives], collection of essays, volume III (Burgas: BSU, 2007), pp. 143 ff.

influence in relation to the policies of the European institutions, on the other;

4. The aspect of practical canonical regulation of the territorial Orthodox canonical dioceses in a united Europe.

## **The Orthodox Church and fundamental human rights and freedoms in light of the law of the European Union**

Experiencing the context of general European policies within the territory of the EU, the Orthodox Church faces serious challenges and options. These are issues that the Church has not met in all its millennial history, but which have to be met now by heightened responsibility and sensibility. In the framework of EU legislation, the Orthodox Church has an immediate opinion on problems related to religious freedom principles and the respect of fundamental human rights, both individual and collective.

As is well known, the criteria and standards in the human rights field and the monitoring of their observance in the EU member-states by the European Council, are bound in the so-called 'political criteria of the European Union', relevant to supporting the supremacy of the law and the constitutional state (the so-called 'First Criterion of Copenhagen'). The context of the European integration of the Republic of Bulgaria requires the establishment of stable and democratic constitutional states based on the supremacy of law. Therefore, the execution and strict observance of these requirements has now attained much more importance.<sup>5</sup>

Religious freedom is both an individual and a collective right. It is a compendious right which comprises the freedom of faith, conscience, religious beliefs and ritual practices. This is the reason for including religious freedom in many international acts which guarantee fundamental human rights and freedoms. These acts charge national governments to provide in their national legislation effective guarantees for the unhindered practice of religious beliefs by individuals within national territories, as well as to provide the necessary means of legal protection. The sense of that right and the priority related to the term 'freedom' is emphasised by Professor of International and Constitutional Law, Christian Tomushat: the decree that proclaims the freedom of thought, conscience and religion is 'a corner-stone of human dignity', as only through that dignity 'a human being could advance their own personality and ratify their own

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 144 ff.

personality’.<sup>6</sup> As has been mentioned above, the doctrine of the Orthodox Church inextricably binds fundamental human rights with human dignity, spiritual being and a free personality, as well as with the equality of people in the eyes of God. Therefore, the Church guarantees the equality of rights by virtue of law and justice. That is why it is an obligation and a responsibility of the Church to maintain dialogue and have a clear position towards EU policies in the sphere of fundamental human values which are affirmed as normative, namely on the basis of the Church’s experience and doctrines on Christian morality and ethics.<sup>7</sup>

One of the dominant principles of modern secular law is the principle of the irreversible rights of a person. The background of the Christian idea of the law is that consciousness comes from the biblical teaching of the person as the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). That is to say, the church considers a person as an ontologically free creature. Freedom belongs to human beings within the Divine Act of creation and therefore is a constant component of the human being according to the Creator’s Will. These fundamental formulations of Christian theology and the doctrine of the Christian church assume the extraction of a human rights doctrine from the Natural Law sphere (*Lex Naturalis*) as well as from Divine Law (*Jus Divinum*). It is also held that the fundamental human rights of the person are awarded and guaranteed by God, and are not extracted from any external nomination of rights.<sup>8</sup> Following that order of Christian ethics, the church insists on assuring the individual of a certain autonomous sphere where his or her conscience would remain ‘the absolute ruler’, as it depends only on the free expression of will to reach salvation or the fall – joining Christ or falling away from Christ. To this effect, the right of religion comes as an expression of the inmost human freedoms, and the protection of this right will result in protection from the arbitrariness of ‘evil’. These inner rights, inherent to human nature, complement and guarantee some other existent and external rights such as the right of freedom, of access to information, of the inviolability of private life, of forming associations, of free movement, etc. The ancient Roman legal rule of guaranteeing the inviolability of the rights of others is a basis of justice in the moral sense and also a standard for an impartial legal and social order and it is not accidentally embraced by the church. The Gospel of

<sup>6</sup> Zh. Peteva, ‘Svoboda na misalta, savestta i religijata’ [Freedom of thought, conscience and religion, in Bulgarian], in Evgeni Tanchev, ed., *Osnovni Prava na Choveka i Grazhdanina* [Basic human and citizen’s rights], (Sofia: Albatros, 1998), p. 180.

<sup>7</sup> Nushev and Nikolchev, ‘Svobodata na veroizpovedaniata i Bulgarskata Pravoslana Tsarkva,’ p. 145.

<sup>8</sup> I. Panchovski, ‘Razkritie na biblejskata ideja sa estestvenija pravstven zakon i iztochnite ottsi i uchiteli na Tsarkvata vav vrazka s antichnata filosofska etika [Development of the biblical idea of natural moral law in the Eastern Fathers and teachers of the Church in relation to the philosophical ethics of antiquity], *Duhovna Kultura* [Culture of the Spirit], volume 5 (1974), pp. 8 ff.

Luke says: 'And as you wish that people would do to you, do so to them' (6:31; see also Matthew 7:12).

Human freedom is a gift from God and an expression of elevated human dignity. As it is recognised by God Himself, so it must be respected by society and government as well. According to the Divine Plan of the creation of humanity and His Providence in preserving human beings' fundamental rights, God maintains human freedom, the human right of self-determination and free choice through His Divine Will and Divine Law. God never forces human will. In other words, if the law shows consideration for the Divine Justice (*Justitia Dei*) taught by Our Lord Jesus Christ as a basis of human morals in its individual and social dimensions, so the law itself will watch out for human freedom and therefore guard the rights of the person: 'Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' (2 Cor 3:17).<sup>9</sup> In other words, 'The Church's demand for establishing justice has a fundamental value. For Orthodoxy, that demand somehow transforms into a demand for love of humankind and a personal righteousness'.<sup>10</sup>

In modern Christian ethics, church law and the social doctrine of the church on the subject of human rights are seriously examined and unambiguously charge each individual Christian and the institutional church communities to engage in active social service to protect fundamental human rights. It states that spiritual and social service is of high importance in cases of obvious injustice, discrimination, or in cases of impairment or endangerment of any fundamental human right by the specific social conditions today.

The background of that actual situation reasonably provokes the question: To what extent are local Orthodox churches (particularly the Bulgarian Orthodox Church) active along these lines, and are they supporting their missionary duties and responsibilities for social service in society with the necessary attempts?<sup>11</sup> That question is provoked by the problem of relations between the ecclesiastical and religious communities in Europe, especially within the environment of a united Europe. There is one other subject that comes under the same problem—European integration at a political level and the decisions of the European institutions

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<sup>9</sup> D. Nikolchev and K. Nushev, 'Svobodata na veroizpovedaniata i Bulgarskata Pravoslana Tsarkva' [Freedom of religion and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church], *Bogoslovska Misal* [Theological thought], Volumes 1-4, 2001, p. 60 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Hristodoulos, 'European Principles and Values'.

<sup>11</sup> Nikolchev and Nushev, 'Svobodata na veroizpovedaniata...', pp. 60 ff.



that refer to various aspects of religious freedom and religions in contemporary European society.

Related to individual rights and freedoms, some observers and researchers think Orthodoxy has an indifferent conception of natural human rights. Even more strongly, it is sometimes claimed that the Eastern Orthodox Church is negatively disposed towards the modern legal ideas of religious rights and freedoms. The question is as follows: are the spiritual ideas of Orthodoxy compatible with the accepted values of human rights and freedom of belief which lie behind the fundamentals of the European legal structure, or are these Orthodox ideas incompatible with European civilisation?<sup>12</sup> As has been stated above, freedom of thought, conscience and religion are fundamental values for Christianity and the Orthodox Church. They are also the basis for the modern legal conceptions of fundamental human values. The Orthodox Church has categorically expressed its positive attitude many times lately and even a number of years ago. After the end of World War II the Orthodox Church stated an opinion concerning these matters, for example, on the occasion of the reception of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (art.18) by the United Nations (1948), and also by many inter-ecclesiastical statements and attitudes.<sup>13</sup>

For example, speaking before the London Hellenistic Society at the London School of Economics (3 November 2005), the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos noted that the concept of 'personal freedom, free dignity and integrity of every single human being is the fundament of what we name the 'European idea'. It is also the leading principle of the EU'.<sup>14</sup> That is the exact point of the role of religion within Europe, where personal freedom is a fundamental quality, similar to the Christian doctrine of the human personality. 'The truth shall make you free' says Jesus Christ (John 8:32); 'Am I not free?' the Apostle Paul asks rhetorically (1 Cor 9:1). Stating freedom in the relationship between God and the world, the Epistle of Diognetus from the second century also says: 'God is convincing, and not forcing; as force is foreign to Him'. For Patriarch Bartholomeos that,

<sup>12</sup> That question was also asked by Abbot Veniamin Novik, 'Hristianskoe Ponimanie Prav Cheloveka' [Christian understanding of human rights], in *Pravoslavie, Hristiansvo, Demokratiia* [Orthodoxy, Christianity, democracy] (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Archbishop Anastasii Yanulatos, 'Pravoslaviето i Pravata na Choveka' [Orthodoxy and human rights], in *Pravoslaviето i Globalizatsijata* [Orthodoxy and globalisation] (Silistra: Foundation "Demos," 2005), p. 61; Todor Sabev, 'Religious liberty', in a collection of Subev's essays *Church and Culture in Service to Society and Unity*, (Veliko Tarnovo: University "Sv.Sv Kiril i Metodii" Publisher, 2003) pp. 326-342.

<sup>14</sup> Bartholomeos, "Patriarchal speech," p. 53.

‘is a golden idea and it is such a pity that Christians have paid such little attention to it throughout the centuries’.<sup>15</sup>

Our freedom is not just personal, but interpersonal as well. Human creatures are not able to be really free if in isolation, rejecting relationships with the rest of humanity. We can be really free only if we are in community with other free people, as freedom does not belong to singularity, but is a social category. We are free only if we become *prosopon*—the Greek word for personality, person, which literally means ‘face’, or ‘image’. That is, if we turn toward others we face their eyes and also allow them to face ours. To turn your back, to refuse to share, means to imitate freedom.<sup>16</sup> As Metropolitan of Pergama John (Zizioulas) writes: ‘The being of God is a relational being; without the community concept it is impossible to talk of God’s being’.<sup>17</sup> That is an inherent part of the Christian doctrine concerning God.

## The Christian community and the European Constitution

The Treaty establishing the European Constitution, and the absence of a clear and definite text in the Preamble concerning the fundamental role of Christianity in defining the basic values of the EU, led to serious debates and tensions between the European Christian community and the European Union institutions. The most prominent figures of the Roman Catholic Church and its representatives and operative bodies/authorities reacted personally by notes of protest and declarations. The then pope John Paul II, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), the Chairman of the Episcopal Conferences of the Roman Catholic Church, Bishop Joseph Homeyer, an official representative before the EU, the Assembly of the Council of the Conference of the European Bishops have all actively joined this debate. Through these protests the Roman Catholic Church expressed its disagreement with the disrespect of Christian historical and cultural contributions toward European progress.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), quotation from the translation into Serbian in Zizioulas, *Bitieto kako zaednicharene* (Veles, 2000), p. 107.

<sup>18</sup> For more details see: Joseph Ratzinger, *Una mirada a Europa: Iglesia y modernidad en la Europa de las revoluciones* (Madrid: Rialp, D.L., 1993); Al. Omarchevski, ‘Evriopejskata Konstitutsija i Pravoslaviето v Obedinena Evropa’ [The European Constitution and Orthodoxy in United Europe], in *Orthodoxy and the World Today* (Sofia: Omofor and Sofia University Publishing House, 2006), p. 368; William Cool, ‘Evropejskijat Sajuz Disputira Proklamiraneto na Svojata Hristijanska Istorija’ [The European Union discusses declaring its Christian history], in *Tsarkoven Vestnik* [Church gazette], No. 13 (2002).

Some Protestant denominations have also protested against the texts from the Preamble of the proposed European Constitution, while stating their position for enlisting a text referring to the Christian background and inheritance. The Conference of European Churches as well has taken a similar position before the EU institutions.

Related to that discussion the local Orthodox churches have also expressed their active position. On 18-19 March 2003 an inter-Orthodox meeting on the project for the European Constitution took place in Heraklion in Crete, initiated by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos I. The conference was attended by the representatives of 11 local Orthodox churches. The meeting took place under the heading: 'The European Constitution for the Churches and Religions: Motions of the Orthodox Church'. At that forum the local Orthodox churches discussed questions and problems related to the drawing up of the project of the European Constitution, thus stating their own positions for religions and churches in the modern world in the context of religious tolerance, religious freedom and the separation of the church from the state. Special attention was paid to defining the criteria for classifying the destructive or criminal organisations which pretend to present their activities as religious ones. The members of the inter-Orthodox meeting have expressed their conviction that the rights of European citizens must not be limited to the individual level only, but must be regarded at the social and institutional level as well. The meeting also discussed the ambiguous nature of biotechnology and its practical use in Europe, problems related to the institution of marriage, the absence of a general understanding of Christian ideas and values in Europe. The final document underlined that the European Constitution should clearly refer to the Christian inheritance of Europe.

Some heads of the local Orthodox churches have also declared in public their own positions on the place of Christianity in the European Constitution. His Beatitude Hristodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Hellas, has stated that being European citizens obliges us first to recognise the spiritual, cultural, national-religious and other fundamental roots of our common historical background and only after that are we free to act in accordance with our own ideas for a better common future.<sup>19</sup> In his message to the EU institutions the European-minded Orthodox bishop underlined that we Christians do wish 'to see Christianity mentioned [*as part of the text in the European constitution – my note*] as a creator of our culture, also as the force that shall convince us the beginning of that unity is going to be European in all means... Its formulation shall not threaten the

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<sup>19</sup> Omarchevski, 'Evriopejskata Konstitutsija i Pravoslavieto', p. 366 ff.

freedom of religion, nor force society, neither contradict basic human rights nor be an obstacle to the prosperity of non-Christian European citizens...We, the Christians are obliged neither to allow the creation of a cultural nationalism of any kind nor to allow racism. But we are obliged to keep awake the European conscience and its identity as a cultural community.<sup>20</sup>

At this stage the project for placing in force the European Constitution on time in 2006 failed after the negative results of the referendums in France and the Netherlands on its adoption. That fact forced European leaders to accept a new statement (the Berlin Statement) providing for the enrolment of a new constitutional treaty with a deadline in 2009, and a fundamental renovation for the EU institutions. The word 'constitution' is used nowhere in the body of the text but instead emphasises the indispensability of negotiating a new 'treaty' by 2009.<sup>21</sup> The most devastating blow to the EU was made by Ireland through her 'NO' vote on the Lisbon Treaty (June 2008)—an act throwing the European Union into a deep internal crisis, also concerning the complete uncertainty of future expansion.

That crisis of institutional and moral values caused the church and religious organisations in Europe to make a prompt reaction. For example, Pope Benedict XIV made a very sharp speech about the EU to the members of a conference organised by the European bishops on the occasion of the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. The Pope claimed the EU was denying the Christian inheritance, thus alienating itself from the population of the continent. The Pope thinks it is impossible to plan the building of a new European home through ignoring the distinctive identity of the European nations, a historical, cultural and ethical identity expressed in the cumulative value inherited from Christianity. The Pope exposed the 'peculiar manner of the apostasy of Europe', as though Europe would like to retain itself as a community of values while at the same time more and more calling into question the existence of universal and absolute values. Pope Benedict XVI considers that Christian values are the soul of the continent, which must also be preserved in the Europe of this present

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<sup>20</sup> Hristodoulos, 'European Principles and Values'.

<sup>21</sup> "Tozi vikend: Praznuvat 50 Godini Zedno v Evropa" [This weekend: Celebrating 50 years together in Europe], editorial in <http://www.vesti.bg/index.phtml?tid=40&oid=1022377>, last accessed on 9 April 2010.

millennium, since Europe insists on remaining a guiding model for the rest of the world.<sup>22</sup>

The Orthodox Church has stood against the disrespect of Christian values that are fundamental for European culture. The late Archbishop of Athens and all Greece Hristodoulos stated in a speech that ‘it represents a constitution that tries to hide the existence of the ‘European’ and speaks of European citizens as some kind of creatures who are prepared in workshops of pseudo-political expediency. Also the Constitution was a step, although an uncertain and indecisive step, towards a completion of the European political process. Admitting it would be a strong stimulus for strengthening European identity, but also help to reject some elements which are foreign to that identity’.<sup>23</sup> For His Beatitude ‘the Europeans’ position on that issue has become the indicator of their health condition. That was a contradiction, but in full accordance with their cultural inheritance. Therefore they actually didn’t reject the Constitution, but expressed their protest against the erasing of their cultural identity. They rejected the imposed ideals’.<sup>24</sup>

The existing political tension for the future of the EU and the religious debate led to the recognition that the future structure of Europe is not an unattainable project at all, but requires huge efforts and reasonable mutual compromises for building it. That idea is supported by the many theses that offer different approaches for achieving the general goal. Some ‘formulas’ such as ‘Europe of the many speeds’, ‘Europe of the concentric circles’, ‘Europe *a la carte*’<sup>25</sup> have been tolerated, as these formulas additionally complicate the process of integration and the achieving of common European goals and perspectives. Anyway, let us hope the European Union will reach stability and the European institutional and governmental sector will become more dynamic and flexible, thus improving communication between these and the variety of governmental

<sup>22</sup> ‘Frans Pres: Kakvo ne Kazva Berlinskata Deklaratsija’ [Frans Press: What is not said in the Berlin Declaration], editorial in <http://www.vesti.bg/index.phtml?tid=40&oid=1022896>, last accessed on 9 April 2010.

<sup>23</sup> A speech held at a protocol lunch given by Archbishop Hristodoulos to honor the Greek Euro-commissar H. E. Stavros Dimas and the Greek deputies in the EU parliament, Athens, Greece, 27 February 2006. The text is published on 27.02.2007 under the title: “Η πορεία της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης και η στάση της Εκκλησίας” [The direction of the development of the EU and the position of the Church] on the official web-page of the Archbishopric of Athens: <http://ecclesia.gr>, quoted in: *Bogoslovska Misal* [Theological thought], Volumes 1-4, 2007, p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 35 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Zh. Popova, *Osnovi na Pravoto na Evropejskija Sajuz* [Legal bases of the European Union] (Sofia: Planeta-3, 2001), pp. 440-443.

and non-governmental and religious organisations who are all stakeholders.<sup>26</sup>

## **The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the European integration process**

During the past sixteen years since the beginning of the democratic changes in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has in general demonstrated an inconsistent attitude. In particular, that is due to the inherited background, formed during the totalitarian period of our country, also the narrow-minded attempts at solving current problems of religious freedom only through the experience of patterns and norms from the past. Nevertheless, today it is more than necessary to face the current European membership of Bulgaria and acquire the existing European patterns rather than rely solely on historical models of interrelation with the state and its institutions. The problems of the post-communist transition must find their solution in the context of the regulations of European integration and consideration of the new reality of modern Europe and the membership of Bulgaria in the EU. Due to the problems inherited through both the communist past and the totalitarian period, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has cancelled active membership in some important international and European inter-church forums and organisations. In 1998 the Bulgarian Orthodox Church withdrew from the World Council of Churches (WCC) with rather intangible and ill-grounded reasons before the Bulgarian Church public.<sup>27</sup>

Obviously the Orthodox Church as a whole and also the local Orthodox Churches have declared many times their differences with many aspects of the WCC's activities during past years. That unsatisfactory position concerning the present participation of Orthodoxy in the WCC was officially announced during the inter-Orthodox meeting in Thessaloniki in 1997 (29 April – 2 May).<sup>28</sup> Besides critical observations of the work and activities of the WCC, the local Orthodox churches, in general, have retained their membership and participation in this international religious organisation. Only two local Orthodox churches, the Bulgarian and the Georgian, are an exception from the conventional Orthodox community as these withdrew their participation from the WCC the very next year, 1998. Since 1998 the Bulgarian Orthodox Church also no longer takes part in the working process of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) where the

<sup>26</sup> D. Jotov, *Evrointegratsijata v Oblastta na Vatreshnite Raboti* [Euro-integration of internal affairs] (Sofia: Feneja, 2004), p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> See the official statement of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church from 27 May 1998: 'Prekratjavame Uchastieto si v Svetovniya savet na Tsarkvite' [We cancel our participation in the WCC] in *Tsarkoven Vestnik* [Church gazette], No. 11 (1998).

<sup>28</sup> 'Pravoslaviето: 'Nov Pogled kam Ikumenizma' [Orthodoxy: A new perspective on ecumenism] in *Tsarkoven Vestnik* [Church gazette], No. 11 (1998).

local Orthodox churches jointly elaborate various positions about many contemporary problems of religion and social life within the context of the general European landmass. Joined under that organisation Christian churches in Europe independently and autonomously define (according to the subsidiarity principle) many of their own positions and standpoints for representation before the institutions of the European Union.

The constituting of the European Union added both unity and disunity to the image of Europe due to intense pluralistic traditions within Europe and a limited definition of specifics. That process of globalisation and pluralism gives to the various traditions, as to the Orthodox one too, a unique chance to act in the general public, thus making a broader impact on the modern world and working along with others for the future of a united Europe.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, I suppose, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church commits a serious mistake by avoiding adequate participation in relation to the EU organs and institutions, thus alienating itself from the life of Europe. Evading responsibilities does not make the Bulgarian Orthodox Church come closer to the world but alienates it both from the world and the eschatological mystery of Christ. That mystery is the living reality, a completeness of the Kingdom of Christ here on earth, but is in immediate connection with the Kingdom of Heaven. Refusing dialogue for solving social conflicts in Europe leads to negative results for any society and religious community. It is obvious that the life of the pluralistic society is defined as a set of penetrating questions of social significance. And our Orthodox Church must not avoid these questions in real life; it must not accept a passive position. To declare that she is living in peace, the Church must overcome conflicts and differences even if the disagreements look insurmountable. Tolerance is a virtue of heart and of significant moral value for the Church. Tolerance must be distinguished from relativism by denying judgment between right and wrong, truth and lie, good and evil related to faith and its acts.<sup>30</sup> On the contrary, making such private and public statements are the consequence of observing tolerance, but unfortunately the Bulgarian Orthodox Church keeps a distance from such activities.

Establishing and supporting active therapy through cooperation both with church members and individuals of good-will in the modern world is of great importance for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. By no means can

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<sup>29</sup> Proto-presbyter Georgi Dragas, 'Pravoslavnoto Bogoslovie v Savremennija Svjat' [Orthodox theology in the contemporary world], in *Orthodoxy and the World Today*, pp. 110 ff.

<sup>30</sup> Fr Emanuil Klapsis, 'Pravoslavnite Tsurkvi v Edin Pluralistichen Svjat' [Orthodox churches in a pluralistic world], in *Orthodoxy and the World Today*, p. 392.

that be treated as a recantation from Orthodox principles, nor can it be considered the abandonment of background or traditions. Escapism and passivity do not facilitate its role in the modern world anyway. It is necessary to find the proper means for recognising this, thus adapting common values and perceptions, i.e. search and find the proper internal and external pattern for performing their own particular service.<sup>31</sup> This is especially true as we live in times when global evil should receive a decent global response. The radical changes in Europe have introduced an entirely new spirit and brand new inter-human and international realities. A transition towards a non-confrontational system of mutual co-existence has also been settled. The principles of democracy are concentrated into a very complicated but promising process for establishing a democratic and prosperous Europe<sup>32</sup>. Both Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church own their just position and significance within this new framework.

## **The territorial Orthodox Canonical Dioceses in a United Europe: Challenges and perspectives**

The structure of a general representation of the local Orthodox churches before the institutions of the European Union and the interaction between the autocephalous Orthodox Churches themselves and their contact with the EU institutions in the expanding of a united Europe are all matters of significant importance for the future attention of the Orthodox Church and in particular of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. What about the representation of the canonical structures of the autonomous Orthodox Churches in the European Union? Shall these be treated as independent subjects under a church jurisdiction, church and church–state relations examined in each diocese, or through their own communities' bond in the Diaspora? Some specialists and experts have pointed out the necessity of forming a new canonical Orthodox structure or a conference of the Orthodox bishops in the EU by the various autocephalous churches with a general delegation or general association, thus following the analogy of the Orthodox Church of America (OCA), but such an organization doesn't seem likely to come into being. The similarities to the USA are confined within the church communities of the Diaspora. However the whole scene changes as the European Union integrates the Eastern European countries with traditional local Orthodox churches. At that time these churches enter the common European space along with their entire diocesan territories. The solution of that serious and important question matters for the local

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Proto-presbyter Nikolaj Shivarov, 'Pravoslaviето i Sveta Dnes: Problemi i zadachi' [Orthodoxy and the world today: Challenges and assignments], in *Orthodoxy and the World Today*, p. 53.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 64 ff.



Orthodox churches themselves and also for EU institutions and EU citizens of the Orthodox confession.

At this time there is not a great probability of any real efforts nor can we expect particular results, considering the various factors which obstruct that process. The first factor is related to the absence of Russia in EU politics, and with that absence comes the complicated combination of various interests, mostly political, but which reflect the external politics of the Russian Orthodox Church and its attitude toward other Orthodox churches. The second factor consists of the visible contradictions between the Patriarchates in Constantinople (Istanbul) and in Moscow concerning oversight over the Orthodox Diaspora in Europe. These contradictions were reflected in the activities of the inter-Orthodox preparatory commission during its sessions between 1990 and 1993. The disagreements about the Orthodox Diaspora are obviously set into the decision of the mentioned Orthodox preparatory commission from the sessions on 10-17 November 1990. The conclusion made by that Orthodox forum is 'according to the strict canonical regulations of the Church, the present situation does not allow such rapid transition concerning the Diaspora, due to both historical and pastoral reasons'.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, the issue for the territorial Orthodox canonical dioceses in a united Europe is becoming more complicated due to aggravated relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church concerning the Uniate Christians and the issue of proselytism. In its main and fundamental document concerning that issue, the Russian Orthodox Church admits the most important point for bilateral relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church 'today remains the Uniate and proselytism issues'.<sup>34</sup> The same official document shows that recently the heterogeneous canonical territories and the right of jurisdiction have not been generally considered by the most powerful, the most active and the most influential local Orthodox church, but instead there is a dependence on the existing relations and dialogue with the local Catholic bishops' conferences.<sup>35</sup> The future will show the development of the politics of the local Orthodox churches concerning that general issue, but definitely the common European regulations, principles and values will play a significant role in that dialogue.

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<sup>33</sup> Quotation from 'Osnovnie Printsipi Otnoshenija k Inoslaviju Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi [Main principles of the relationship of the Russian Orthodox Church with other Christian confessions], in <http://www.mospat.ru/ru/documents/attitude-to-the-non-orthodox/>, last accessed 9 April 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## **Conclusion**

The expectations of the Orthodox Church will depend on its adequate, working and constructive activity when defining its merited position in the EU social and legal environment, also due to its position in determining the improvement of the religious, social and cultural future of the European continent, along with the family of the local Orthodox churches and the other European denominations of our continent. The dimensional issue shows that the expectations of both politicians and clergy, believers and non-believers, will forward the steady development of the member-states of the European Union, the active co-operation in all sectors of life, including the recognition and guarantee of the religious rights and freedoms both of the religious communities and institutions and of every single European Community citizen. It is important that the European institutions accept the fact that without considering Christian traditions and values and respecting these both in word and deed the EU will hardly achieve its goals.

All we need is mutual tolerance and mutual trust between the secular perception of the world and the religious sense of the believers, “For God has called us to peace” (1 Cor 7:15) – that is the only way that Europe and the world should follow.

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## 4

# The Integration of Christian Roots in the European Constitution

Bozhidar Andonov

If we define Europe in terms of its values, the important issue is: what are the real values burning in the soul of the old continent, especially if we compare the East and the West? The detailed research of European values, last carried out in 1999<sup>1</sup> can help answer some of the elements of this topic.

## The Different Souls in Europe

On the basis of research into the values mentioned above, it would be possible to suggest one reason why the soul of the Old Continent is so unhappy and helpless: there are different souls in Europe. At one point, the research project has this to say:

In 12 of 18 Western countries almost 1 in 10 people define themselves as unhappy. In 5 countries (Western Germany, Italy, Portugal, Malta, Spain), the number of the unhappy is between 11 and 20%, in Greece the percentage is higher. Only in 2 of the 15 countries in Eastern and Central Europe (Croatia and the Czech Republic) which have been surveyed, no more than every fifth person considers himself or herself unhappy. The percentage of unhappy people, according to their own estimation, is between 21 and 30% in 6 countries (Eastern Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary), 31-40% in Estonia and Belarus, between 41 and 50% in Latvia and above 50% in 4 countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Russia and Ukraine). If we estimate the average percentage, the sense of unhappiness in Eastern Europe is approximately 3 times stronger than in Western Europe. Another indicator of this subjective uncertainty is the sense of helplessness – a lack of influence on things which happen. One cannot tell if the reason is the power of real social involvement or the urge for participation in politics. The difference between the desire and the perceived reality is considered a really important issue. While in Western Europe every tenth person has problems with this helplessness, in Eastern Europe every fifth person feels they cannot help or influence the current situation in their country. The common estimation of the data shows

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Christian Friesl, ed., 'Die europäische Wertestudie' (Vienna, 2002), p. 3. Here and further in the text, the translation is by the author of this paper.

convincingly that the countries of Eastern Europe suffer much more of the sense of helplessness because they are not able to impact their destiny compared to citizens of the West.<sup>2</sup>

## The question of the integration of European roots

The roots of Europe are many and varied. They are found in Greek, Latin and Germanic cultures, as well as influences from Judaism, from the Arabic world and from further east and, of course, most obviously from Christianity. Actually, those Christian roots are not so 'typically European', because Christianity is considered universal and inter-woven in the cultures of all countries, nations and languages. An interpretation of the Christian roots of Europe in the new view of the continent would not be so simple.

During the discussion of whether the European Constitution should adopt a common attitude towards God (for example, including the formula 'in accountability towards God and the people'), the president of France commented: 'Since the time of the French Revolution in 1789 we have been wrestling for secularism and against the state church and finally we have succeeded. You cannot be thinking seriously if you have planned to make us change that today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'.<sup>3</sup>

The French allergy to the intermingling of religious and state matters was also seen in the reactions of the French politicians in the European Union who noted: 'We estimated that in the European Convention on Human Rights the word 'religion' or 'religious' is mentioned 9 times". *Le Monde* even expressed its suspicions that there was an agent of the Vatican in the Convention which formulated European human rights.<sup>4</sup>

During the debate on the topic of the integration of Christian roots in the Constitution of Europe in 2003, Joseph Homeyer, the bishop of Hildesheim in Germany and chairman of the commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, made an intelligent differentiation between denying and 'skipping over' the name of God and raised the question: 'Do we have the right to skip over the name of God in this constitutional establishment of the human foundations in Europe? We have the right and the obligation to guarantee the constitutional possibility of denying God. The atheistic and secular privileges of citizens are as much in

<sup>2</sup> Miklos Tomka, 'Wertepreferenzen in 'Ost' und 'West'', in Hermann Denz, ed., *Die europäische Seele. Leben und Glauben in Europa* (Vienna, 2002, pp. 184ff.

<sup>3</sup> Ingo Friedrich, 'Wertediskussion in Europa an der Schwelle der Osterweiterung', in Renovabis, ed., *Europa – eine Wertegemeinschaft? Gesellschaftliches Handeln in christlicher Verantwortung* (Freising: 2003), p. 144.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

need of protection, as their religious tendencies. I don't say this with a liberal freedom, but I would like to be sure that the name of God would not be put against human freedom. God should not be forced, as the Sermon of the Mount should not be denied'.

The European Constitution should guarantee the possibility of denying God, namely, the human right of religious freedom. We have the right to deny. Do we have the right to keep silent? No, we do not! We Europeans, who live on this continent which has survived so many battles, are connected by commonalities and memories. In our constitution we should be accountable for the most terrible crime of humankind, that of Auschwitz. There, in Auschwitz, amongst the dying and crying, the name of the Lord was called upon: 'Hear, o Israel! Yahweh our God is the Only One!' This happened a million times. Was that cry personal business? Or was it the last call towards future humanism, rights and freedom in the name of God? 'What would the Jewish citizens of Paris, Warsaw and Berlin think today, if in the Preamble of the future European Constitution there was no mention of the name of God?'<sup>5</sup>

From the internal space of Christianity our question about the integration of the Christian roots of Europe in the European constitution is really being asked rather late, but it is being asked seriously: nevertheless, this question was interpreted politically. For example, in a commentary printed in the weekly magazine *Christ in der Gegenwart*<sup>6</sup>, the author asked, 'What makes Europe European?' A 'cultural identity' which excludes others, could not be conceded as such, as the *Neue Zuercher Zeitung* comments. There is not a European culture which could cover the entire territory of the continent. Christianity itself is not the measure of what is European. In the final analysis all the Christian nations have fought against each other. Christianity is divided against itself. There is still the open question: would a Scandinavian Protestant feel more comfortable in a Greek Orthodox Church than in a mosque in Istanbul? The authoritative press organ of the Swiss Confederation, a country which completely rejects plans for integration in the European Union, expressed the opinion that at the moment it is fashionable that Europe is multicultural and that Christianity should not have special demands on the European Union.

But shall we ask, if that is true, why, then, have secularists or other faith communities done little for the uniting of post-war Europe? Why was it that politicians with a Christian background, not merely the respected

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<sup>5</sup> *Kirchenzeitung für das Bistum Eichstätt* 66 (2003), Nr.24, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Christ in der Gegenwart* 55 (2003): 209.

thinkers, were those who cared primarily about the peace projects after the Second World War? Here, nothing should be interpreted as accidental or outside of history: the defining powers that cared about the reestablishment of Europe were among the engaged Christian politicians, whose religious conscience had been shaken, who had learned the lessons of history and who cared about the well-being of their countries. Since the very beginning of the process of uniting Europe, among the good Europeans were Christian citizens of the world with a wide world view. They realised that the era of globalisation had already begun through the spread of Christianity, by its ability of historical criticism and self-criticism, which could overcome the traditionally religious and the nationalistic patriotic conscience.

Besides, Christians prepared and hastened the process of the Europeanisation of Eastern European countries. The powerful word of the pope supported the enlightening activity of bishops and local clergy in Poland and achieved something which politicians, historians and economists could not. Due to the encouragement of the most popular Polish citizen of the world and a European, Pope John Paul II, many local Poles went on to vote and said 'Yes' to European integration. Poland has more citizens than all the other candidate countries together that entered the EU with the enlargement in 2004. Bulgaria has now also joined the EU in 2007. The Slavonic part of the lungs of the EU has started to breathe slowly, but certainly. Furthermore, with its alliance with Washington and London, Bulgaria has won international influence and respect. Bulgaria with other Slavic cultures of the European Union will contribute to the processes of integration and this will change Europe.

The identity of Europe is not only reduced to its Christian image. Educated Christians, however, have constantly contributed to the European identity. Europe will be in a process of continuing transformation and it will benefit in the future from the support of those Christians who are open to changes and bold enough to joyfully realise them.

## Conclusion

In the Preamble of the European Constitution, which was considered at the meeting of the European Union on 20 June 2003 in the Greek city of Porto Karas, it says:

We realise that the continent of Europe is a cradle of civilisation and its citizens who have settled there during the centuries, have created the values which are the basis of humanism: equality, freedom, and common sense. We continue to cherish the cultural, religious and

humanistic traditions of Europe whose values are still alive in its inheritance. The main points in its principles are the central position of human being and the idea of keeping human rights unharmed in accordance with social legislation. We are convinced that a united Europe will continue ahead on the road of civilisation, promoting the progress and well-being of all its citizens. It also has concern for the weakest and the poorest, as Europe is striving to become a continent which is open for culture, knowledge and social development.<sup>7</sup>

The formula of that part of the Constitution which is of main interest to us, says the following: ‘We keep cherishing the cultural, religious and humanistic tradition of Europe...’ It is obvious that the name of God is not mentioned directly. We should admit, however, that unlike the text in the Convention on Human Rights, at least this text mentions the religious inheritance of Europe and considers it as important.

**Doc Dr Bozhidar Andonov, Sofia, Bulgaria**

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<sup>7</sup> *Kirchenzeitung für das Bistum Eichstätt* 66 (2003), Nr.25, p. 13.

## 5

# **Enabling Ecclesial and National Leadership in the Orthodox Context: Armenia and Ethiopia**

Petros G. Malakyan

### **Context: Armenia**

Armenia, at the beginning of the fourth century, was the first Christian nation that embraced Christianity as a state religion. The Armenian Apostolic (Orthodox) Church, as the national church of Armenia, has survived for centuries and preserved her Christian doctrine and tradition.

A leadership development program among laity and clergy was launched in 2001 through the National Leadership Institute (NLI), Yerevan, Armenia ([www.clinternational.org](http://www.clinternational.org)), the Faculty of Theology, Yerevan State University (YSU), Yerevan, Armenia, and Apostolic-Orthodox Seminary of Etchmiadzin, Armenia. NLI's vision has been to train not only ecclesial but also Armenian national leaders through non-formal methods. YSU has its focus on providing formal education for laity and clergy. The target audience for the Orthodox Seminary, on the other hand, has been solely to educate and train clergymen for the Apostolic-Orthodox churches in Armenia and beyond.

### **Leadership development through NLI**

Christ's 'training the twelve' model has been implemented among young Apostolic adults over the course of three years with informal (one-on-one coaching, mentoring) and non-formal training (seminars, workshops, conferences and lectures), along with hands-on ministry experience and leadership practice in communities and organisations.

### **Christian education through YSU**

Professional training (formal education) has been offered to enable students to become Christian education teachers, both lay workers and clergy in the Armenian Apostolic-Orthodox churches, and writers/researchers in the field of Armenian theology and church history.



## **Leadership development through the Apostolic-Orthodox Seminary**

A special class has been initiated within the Etchmiadzin Apostolic-Orthodox Seminary (2002-2005) to prepare parish priests for villages and towns throughout Armenia.

## **Context: Ethiopia**

Ethiopia perhaps is the only ancient Christian nation in Africa that has never been colonised. Ethiopia accepted Christianity in the middle of the fourth century. After the collapse of the socialist regime in the 1990s, Ethiopia embraced a democratic form of government and a free-market society. It is the home of the African Union conference.

A leadership development program among federal and regional leaders of the country has been launched through International Leadership Institute (ILI) and the Operation Impact Program, Azusa Pacific University in 2004 ([www.apu.edu/bas/csaol/operationimpact](http://www.apu.edu/bas/csaol/operationimpact)). ILI and APU's vision has been to (1) educate and empower national leaders in the Orthodox country of Ethiopia through formal education by offering a Master of Arts degree in Organizational Leadership and (2) train Ethiopian church leaders, a church with nearly seventeen centuries of rich Christian heritage, and in a position to enhance spiritual, economic, and social change.

The students come from various religious backgrounds (Christian, Muslim, and African religions). ILI and APU have been offering leadership training from a faith-based perspective. The servant-leadership model is used for international cooperation, and a 'learning together' attitude has been fostered in classrooms to create synergy and mutual understanding and a learning environment.

## **Canonical territories and contextual considerations**

Armenia as an Apostolic-Orthodox nation and territory has been predominantly a Christian nation with its rich Christian and cultural heritage. The church has a strong written tradition dating back to the fifth century, along with music, arts, architecture, and literature throughout seventeen centuries. As a result, the Apostolic Church has gained spiritual and moral authority among Armenians to be considered the leading force of the nation.

Ethiopia as an Orthodox nation and territory over the years has become a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Ethiopia is no longer a mono-Christian country, since only 60% of the population is considered Orthodox. However, Muslims, Christians, and people identified with African religions live, study and work together harmoniously. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church remains one of the major leading forces of national identity and spiritual authority.

## **Mission-Theology of the Orthodox Church**

Christian witness in the Orthodox context requires a thorough investigation and understanding of the Orthodox theology of mission and missionary practice in the Orthodox context. Lack of awareness may cause mistrust and even resistance to mission activities on the part of the Orthodox Church and be viewed as proselytism. Thus, theological and missiological understanding is necessary for effective Christian witness in the Orthodox context.

What is Christian witness for the Orthodox Church and how can one foster ecclesial leadership development? To be able to answer this question it is crucial that we understand the mission theology of the Orthodox Church.

## **Church**

Orthodox theology holds a holistic view on the concept of the church or Christian community. It is not a merely religious society of converts, but rather the incarnation of Christ's new life on earth, God-created, with a God-given reality and the manifestation of the new 'aeon' of the Holy Spirit that embraces life as a whole. On the other hand, it is believed that the world has not been transformed into the Kingdom and the society into the church. Thus the Orthodox ecclesiology views the church as the 'ontological abyss' between the present and the future eschaton, 'the Kingdom yet to come and the church not of this world'.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the present world is united with the future Christian hope in the ecclesiastical and eschatological understanding of the church. Everything and everyone is called to be a part of the church, there is no 'us' and 'them' or the world and the church in the Orthodox context. Thus, the whole society is a church, the individual, the family unit, and the community at large.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), pp. 209-216.

This paradigm has deeply impacted not only my understanding, but also my own service and witness in the Armenian Apostolic (Orthodox) Church. I would consider it to be a key to success for Christian witness in the Orthodox context. Such an understanding of a Church is perhaps both a big responsibility and somewhat an expression of territorialism.<sup>2</sup> The Orthodox Church then is responsible for everything that takes place in society, while at the same time becoming territorially protective of her flock by viewing society and the country, if you will, as a canonical territory. Thus any non-Orthodox witness in an Orthodox context is viewed as proselytism.

## Baptism

Baptism, as one of seven sacraments of the Orthodox Church, is an expression of Christian witness or mission, so to speak. After the baptismal ceremony one becomes a Christian and a member of the Christian community. In the case of infants, this sacrament becomes an act of faith of parents on behalf of their children to pass on God's forgiveness and grace through the church prior to one's self-consciousness. Time and human conscience become irrelevant to prevent one from receiving God's gift of salvation through mediation. The community's decision in this case is perceived acceptable by God. The theological justification comes from Christ's Incarnation. Jesus died for us, while we were sinners or 'unconvinced' of God's love to us for salvation (Rom 5:8-9). As much as Christ's proactive death on the cross has made salvation accessible to humanity, so does the infant baptism exercised by the church make salvation attainable to everyone in the Christian community. Thus, baptism is a mission act, while rebaptism is considered proselytism in the Orthodox context.

There are three essential and non-negotiable participants in any baptism within the Armenian Apostolic (Orthodox) Church context: the baptised, the baptiser, and the witness. As mentioned above, the baptised, be he or she adult or infant, is the recipient of God's salvation, a regenerated self through the forgiveness and remission of sins, and an adopted child into a new family of God, the church, which is the Body of Christ. The baptiser, the priest, who is God's representative on earth to administer the sacrament, is a servant of God. The third participant, without whom baptism cannot be served, is not the physical parent of the baptised,

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<sup>2</sup> John Meyendorff, in *The Vision of Unity*, writes: 'Canonically, the rules and canons of *all* churches strictly forbid the existence of parallel ecclesiastical organizations on the same territory' (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), p. 16.

but rather the godparent, who is considered as a spiritual parent of the baptised. The so-called godfather's role is twofold: (1) to be a witness of the baptismal act and (2) pledge to take the responsibility of spiritual parenting for the baptised. This person, during the baptismal ceremony in the presence of the priest and other community participants, promises God to educate and nurture the baptised, called god-child, *sanik*, in the Christian life of the church. The godfather will become responsible for the spiritual growth and well-being of the god-child.

When I was teaching in the Faculty of Theology at Yerevan State University, Armenia (2000-2004), I had the privilege of leading Bible discussions for the university students at the Student Union of the Armenian Apostolic Church. It was in 2001, when I said 'yes' to a dozen young adults to become their spiritual father at their baptism. We went to a medieval monastery in central Armenia, called Geghard, where the priest baptised them in the name of the Holy Trinity and made me a part of the sacramental ceremony by being next to my spiritual children and pledging to provide spiritual guidance and nurture to my newly born spiritual children. Later, over the years, I have also become godfather to nearly a dozen infants and children from the National Leadership Institute community, which expanded the size of our Christian community under the auspices of the Araratian Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia. These new relationships have opened tremendous doors for me for Christian witness, this time with the families of my god-children. I feel like the authority of the church has fallen upon me as a result of my new role and responsibility as a godparent. I have become a 'relative', a true member, and an inseparable part of those families for a lifetime.

## Prayer

Prayer is a mission for others. Prayers made in the Church are for the Church community and even society at large. I remember my conversation with one of the priests at our parish during the season of Lent two years ago. It was during one of the morning-prayer hours when I asked the priest why we do not announce the chapters and verses of the scriptural passages of the reading of the day to those who are present in the church during the prayers. His response to me was rather surprising and profoundly deep. He said: 'I am in the presence of God now interceding for the entire nation and I should not be distracted by those, who are present in the church. Let them use the church calendar and learn about the reading of the day after the prayer'. This was rather a radically different perspective from that of my own experiences of prayer in Protestant churches where I have been. I used to think that those who are present in the church are more important than

those who are absent. I remember, growing up in a Baptist church, I would even condemn in my heart those who missed the weekly prayers and considered them less spiritual or less pious. To learn about such a missionary paradigm of prayer, was rather transformational for me. Thus, prayer is not for showing off to people how spiritual we are, which is a false prayer, but it is for interceding before God for those who surround us.<sup>3</sup>

## Liturgy

Liturgy or *padarag* (sacrifice), which is the climax of Orthodox worship, is a witness of Christ's love for humanity through His death and resurrection. It is a play of Christ's passion in such a way that all five human senses participate in the corporate act of worship. It includes confession, worship, adoration, praise, prayer request, celebration and acknowledgement of Christ's eternal presence with His own body, the church community. Rodney Clapp writes:

Just as dancing is inevitably social, so is liturgy. Worship is not private and disconnected from the world outside the walls of any old building. In fact it is incomplete and distorted if removed from that outside surrounding.<sup>4</sup>

Liturgy is an event where the Triune God, all heavenly beings and humans, both deceased and alive, come together for communion, fellowship, and worship of God through the Lamb and the Holy Spirit in specifically designed buildings for prayer and worship. Liturgy is an exchange of blessings, bestowed upon us by God through Christ's death and resurrection, among its participants. Thus, the aim of liturgy remains mission.<sup>5</sup>

## Eucharist

Eucharist is an expression of Christian witness, because the gospel is proclaimed in the Eucharist.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the act of partaking of the bread and the wine, which represent Christ's real presence in those elements among His own people, is a sacred union of humanity with God, a witness

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<sup>3</sup>Matta El-Meskeen, *Orthodox Prayer Life: The Interior Way* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), p. 267.

<sup>4</sup>Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 118.

<sup>5</sup>James J. Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), pp. 101-102.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp.95-99.

of a union between the finite and the infinite. Moreover, the recipient of the Eucharistic elements receives eternal life, Christ Himself, into one's mortal body to become immortal and Christ-like. Apart from the vertical (divine-human) there is also the horizontal (community fellowship) dimension of the Eucharist. It brings the faithful together as an assembly. First, it is a celebration of and an entrance to the Kingdom to offer thanks to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Second, it is a living sacrifice of the human self offered back to the Father through the Lamb. Third, the Eucharist brings people into unity under the banner of Christ's love. Fourth, it is a reminder of the sacrificial love of Christ for humanity in order for us to follow his example and love our neighbour.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Eucharist is a missionary act and a Christian witness to the world about the work of Christ on the cross in the presence of the Triune God and heavenly beings.

## Community

Salvation is both an individual and a communal process according to Orthodox theology. It begins from the baptismal covenant and continues throughout one's lifetime in the life of the church as a member of the family of God.

Coming from an Evangelical-Baptist background and joining the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia, I found myself in a church building but not in a Christian community. The concept of the community of believers was lost among the church-goers due to the communist regime. Parishes were abolished and parish priests were imprisoned or exiled during Stalin's regime. The community concept of the church survived only in the theology of the church and the historical recollection of Orthodox believers. For the most part, this was because of the Soviet persecution of the Church. John Binns writes:

In times of persecution—whether the slow discrimination of the Ottoman or the sudden and vicious pogroms of the Communists—the possibilities for Christian living and witness have been drastically reduced. Evangelism, study, teaching, monastic life have at various times in Orthodox history, and especially in the last century, become all but impossible.<sup>8</sup>

This is also true for the Apostolic Church in Armenia under the Muslims and especially under the militant atheism of the Soviet era. One

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), pp. 11-191.

<sup>8</sup> John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (Cambridge, University Press, 2002), pp. 42-43.

would hardly find a Christian parish that had survived the communist regime. Thus the recognition of this reality has prompted me to engage in leadership and Christian community development within the Armenian Apostolic Church context.

## Unity

Unity is the core value of Orthodox theology. The liturgy, the Eucharist, and participation in other sacraments of the church bring everyone together in unity with God and with one another (shared faith and life). Unity is essential for the Church's mission. Elias Voulgarakis calls unity and mission 'two allied and interlocking forms of the same principle—love'.<sup>9</sup> If unity is broken, either life is interrupted in the Body or mission as a function becomes paralysed. Thus, any Christian witness that causes division and disunity in the Body of Christ, the church, is viewed as schismatic and heretical. Thus, the mission of the church is to keep the church in unity as one Body.

The concept of church unity has been one of the motivating factors for me to join the Orthodox church of Armenia. If Christ prayed for the unity of His disciples and for those who would follow Him through their witness, then unity becomes a key to success in Christian witness in the world (John 17).

## Authority

Christian witness in the Orthodox context always requires authority. One will always encounter a question of authority: 'Have you been given authority for Christian witness?' The Great Commission is understood as the mandate of the church to commission or authorise believers for Christian witness to be executed in unity (Matthew 28:19), since Christ has bestowed this authority upon His disciples. In the Armenian context particularly, I have learned that spiritual authority has been given to the Apostolic Church to lead the nation, as the first church of the Armenians. It is a given authority that has long historical roots. This authority, although theoretically arguable, is yet evident in the relationships between people and the clergy, the society as a whole and the church, the secular authorities and the church hierarchy. On the other hand, Evangelical Christians have not exceeded 20% of the total population of Armenia in the last nearly 200 years.

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<sup>9</sup> Elias Voulgarakis, 'Mission and Unity from the Theological Point of View,' *Porefthendes* 7 (1965), p. 32.

My experience of Christian witness in the Orthodox context made me to think deeply, process, and analyse my own efforts, church status, and role in Christian witness among my own people. This caused me to undergo a paradigm shift to target and remain focused in my training and empowering efforts of Apostolic Christians in the Armenian context. In 2006, I was invited to receive the first ordination of the Apostolic Church, the sub-diaconate. The church gave me authority for preaching, praying over the sick, casting out demons, and serving on the altar during the liturgy. This made me accepted not only by the clergy, but also by my own people.

## Missiological implications

The *Incarnational* approach to Christian witness in the Orthodox context requires one to become an Orthodox to be able to bear Christian witness in the Orthodox context. In other words, one must fully merge or ‘incarnate’ oneself into the Orthodox tradition, language, and culture much like Christ, who became human, who belonged to a specific tradition, language and culture, to save humanity and make them sons and daughters of God through the likeness of the Son of God. Thus, incarnation means, first, belonging to a tradition or a community of believers. Second, it enables one to communicate with others in the same language. Third, incarnation makes one to be identified with the culture as an insider.

Perhaps the transformation process begins when one is identified with a church tradition and through God-given gifts and abilities brings church renewal from within. I found no need to reform the Orthodox church to make it other than Orthodox, but rather to choose to become a part of its inner transformation by growing together in the knowledge and love of Christ, keeping the unity of the Body of Christ, worshiping together as one spiritual and eternal family, and serving the world and one another in unity and love. Stamoolis defines incarnational mission as follows:

In the incarnational approach the prime consideration is the entry of the truth of God into the life and thought of the people... To be an effective communicator of Christ to the people, the missionary must live in a manner that communicates Christ's life. The incarnation does not take place in a sterile environment, but in close contact with the real world.<sup>10</sup>

The incarnational approach to Christian witness in the Orthodox context made me adopt the Armenian Church and her tradition as my own.

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<sup>10</sup> James J. Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), p. 62.



This was a transformational journey and an enriching experience for me by moving to the centre of the existing church structures rather than moving away from them, or keeping a distance from the church.

*Empowerment* is a way of leadership development toward church renewal in the Orthodox context. It is a de-proselytising approach to Christian witness, where a non-Orthodox person empowers an Orthodox person to become a true or better Orthodox. This involves sharing information, knowledge, experience, resources, and providing service. One may choose not to become an Orthodox, but to empower the Orthodox Church and work toward ecumenical unity and fellowship. When I first began my Christian witness in the Armenian Church context as an Evangelical Christian, I used the empowerment approach to build bridges between me and the Orthodox clergy and laity. I found acceptance from them as soon as they realised that my mission was not to start a new denomination by proselytising Orthodox Christians. Instead, I would help the clergy to better serve their own people and the church by bringing my own skills and abilities, as well as resources, to the service of the church and her flock.

*The liturgy after the liturgy* is a 24/7 concept of mission where every participant of the liturgy that represents the Orthodox tradition and culture is invited and challenged to live out the liturgy after Sunday liturgy, from Monday through Saturday. Clapp writes: 'Mission is the work of the people Monday through Saturday, done after and formed by the work of the people on the first day, Sunday'.<sup>11</sup> Thus, liturgy is a mission of the church for the people and with the people of God. For this reason, at the end of the liturgy, the liturgical priest commissions people to continue bearing witness in the society the moment they leave the church building. At the benediction, the parishioners are blessed by the priest to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of reaching out to the community through service and sacrifice for the salvation of all.

I have adopted this principle to fill up the rest of the days of the week with Christian fellowship, Bible studies, teaching/learning activities, leaving the church services untouched. In other words, I would worship and encourage my students to worship God in the church every Sunday, and live out that worship during their weekly activities and lifestyle. I found very often that Orthodox believers lack orthopathy (orthodox lifestyle) in their lives more than doctrinal understanding of the Christian faith. The

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<sup>11</sup> Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 116.

moral and ethical dimension of the Christian lifestyle has been somewhat neglected from the everyday life of an ordinary Christian. I took this challenge and began teaching Christ-like living and morality within the Armenian Apostolic Church context by grounding it in the Scripture and the church tradition.

*‘Our mission’* versus *‘my mission’*. Christian witness in the Orthodox context is the witness of the entire community. As much as worship requires a collective effort, so does Christian witness or mission involve community participation and action on the church’s behalf. Thus the Protestant concept of individual mission has no room in the Orthodox Church. Christian witness is the mission of the church executed by each member of the community in a collective fashion. One should not strive for individual recognition or personal glory for what he or she does for the church, because the authority to engage in any mission activity comes from the church. Instead, it is the community that is responsible for the success and failure of mission endeavours. I believe that the incentive for Orthodox mission should not be the personal ego, but love of God and desire to serve God by serving people through the church. In this case the unity and focus of the church’s mission is preserved. One may rightly note that individual initiatives may not be encouraged by the church government, which makes Christian witness to be the vocational right or the privilege of the church hierarchy.

I have met many discouraged and disappointed Orthodox Christians whose willingness and passion to serve have not been welcomed by the church hierarchy. This factor sometimes paralyses the church from being more engaged and active in society. To respond to such challenges one needs to go back to the liturgy and claim Apostolic authority from within the tradition. I used to initiate numerous services within society as a layman as a response to the call of the priest at liturgy to go to the world for Christian witness by using the gifts of the Holy Spirit and God-given resources.

The balance that I found for myself between *‘our mission’* and *‘my mission’* was that I would commit myself to doing what has been commonly defined as the mission of the Armenian Church with the condition that I would be willing to give up my own ego and die to my own recognition, glory, and appreciation. In other words, one must choose to serve regardless of the cost and lead by serving faithfully and selflessly.<sup>12</sup> For instance, NLI, as a public organisation, pours human, material, and

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<sup>12</sup> Lames C. Hunter, *The World’s Most Powerful Leadership Principle: How to Become a Servant Leader* (USA: WaterBrook Press, 2004).

intellectual resources to organise and support various church ministries (Sunday schools, church choirs, community development projects, Bible study groups, and more) without expecting recognition or rewards. If the mission is God's mission, then no one should expect to receive glory other than God.<sup>13</sup>

## Cultural considerations for national leadership

In most Orthodox cultures, particularly Ethiopian, leadership is 'top-down' and hierarchical. Should one reject this completely, or face reality and seek new models within the existing hierarchical worldview? To train national leaders in the Orthodox context requires an awareness of cultural worldview and characteristics. We, at Azusa Pacific University, have chosen the second option in delivering a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership through the Operation Impact Program. The servant leadership model that we offer to the Ethiopian national leaders is identified within their own Christian worldview and yet remains challenging to the existing authoritarian models of leadership. Value-based leadership involves service, stewardship and communication among leaders and followers for decision making toward the common good of society. Williams and McKibben offer a Trinitarian model of leadership as an essential part of the Orthodox worldview and context.<sup>14</sup> The latter must remain Trinitarian in its leadership approach because (1) as much as God is a person, so must leadership be personal; (2) as much as the Godhead exists in a hierarchical conciliarity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as one God with one will, so must leadership pursue unity and harmony within frequently observed hierarchical relationships between leaders and followers; (3) and as much as God is in a love communion with humanity, so must leaders and followers commune love, unity, and peace among themselves.

Modern leadership studies have generally rejected the hierarchical model due to its tendency to become abusive and authoritarian. However, hierarchical leadership style is nearly unavoidable in Orthodox societies. The solution lies not in plain rejection but rather in the implementation of the Trinitarian hierarchical conciliarity of servanthood, stewardship, and love. The moment a leader operates out of love and service the hierarchical leadership becomes God-like leadership. As Williams puts it:

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<sup>13</sup> James J. Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), pp. 49-52.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin D. Williams, & Michael McKibben, *Oriented Leadership: Why All Christians Need It* (Wayne: Orthodox Christian Publications Center, 1994), 83-120.

Our challenge, our leadership responsibility, is to implement and incarnate these Trinitarian ways of being in each and every leadership situation. The Trinitarian model is the only model which will work. But, it is not a formula; it is a set of dynamic divine truths which can be applied differently, with different outcomes to every leadership situation. The result, nevertheless, will be affirmed, and what will be achieved is unity as a communion of love driven by the perfecting principles of peace and joy.<sup>15</sup>

As Jesus Christ, being God and superior to humanity, chose to become like one of us to serve those who are subordinate to Him, so much so should leaders in the Orthodox context follow Christ's example. APU's goal has never been to remain irrelevant to the Orthodox culture of Ethiopia, but rather to bring change and transformation from within by taking the national leaders to a new understanding and practice of their own religious and cultural values.<sup>16</sup> As Anastasios Yannoulatos puts it:

It is time that we all become conscious of the fact that only a policy of sincere respect for the personality of individuals and nations, of selfless love and humble service, a 'policy' which is based exclusively upon the spirit and laws of the Kingdom of God, can form the basis of Orthodox Mission.<sup>17</sup>

## **Methodologies for Christian witness in the Orthodox context**

### **Incarnational model for Armenia**

Becoming an Orthodox Church member means: witnessing through *life sharing*; teaching and practicing *prayer*; knowing and teaching the *Scriptures*; worshiping in the church and encouraging others for *worship*; and *serving*.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 126

<sup>16</sup> Operation Impact Program's curriculum comprises courses that are value based, with leadership mindset of servanthood, and leadership behavior that is inside out (one leads out of her/his inner being) See also Granberg-Michelson's *Leadership from Inside Out: A Guide for Leading, Living, Working, and Praying* (Crossroad General Interest, 2004). One of our graduates from Ethiopia, Juneydi Saddo, has shared with me his personal transformation as a result of his leadership training. He said: 'Before taking Operation Impact courses, I thought that leadership was something outside of me, an external reality to deal with. After learning about leadership from the inside out, I began my own journey of soul searching. As a result, I became a leader who empowers his colleagues and staff. Now that I've learned to delegate various leadership and administrative tasks, I have more time for my family and my personal growth and development'.

<sup>17</sup> Anastasios Yannoulatos, "Orthodoxy in China." *Porephthendes* 4 (1962), p. 55.

## Life sharing

It was in 1999 that I and my family returned to our own country for ministry. In 2000, I and my whole family (wife and two teenaged children) officially joined the Armenian Apostolic Church by receiving the baptismal seal. This is a beautiful ceremony of being anointed by oil (*myuron*) as a symbol of the blessing bestowed from the Holy Spirit. This marked the beginning of our family's Orthodox journey. Since then until today (2008) my wife and I have shared our lives, knowledge, experience, and resources with NLI disciples and many young adults by teaching and training them for Christian witness in Armenia and beyond.

## Prayer

The Orthodox Church does not encourage believers to pray other than canonical prayers during the liturgy and other ceremonies. However, this does not mean that Orthodox Christians should not pray their own prayers by choosing their own words and creating their own personal prayers. For instance, I would encourage my disciples to pray to God by using their own words and thoughts when they are alone or with their friends outside the church. Grogor Naregatsi, a representative of the Armenian Renaissance of the tenth century, for instance, wrote a prayer book called *Book of Lamentations*, which has survived a thousand years and has become an inspiration and a source of physical and spiritual healing for many Orthodox Armenians for centuries. What a loss it would have been if Naregatsi had not shared with others his intimate prayer with God through his prayer-book. Thus, I challenge my young adult disciples in Armenia to open their hearts and minds to pray as Naregatsi did a thousand years ago. I have been humbled by the fact that these young people began learning and praying not only canonical prayers, but also formulating and uttering their own personal prayers to God during the community gatherings. As a result, they experienced God in a new way that they have never encountered before.

## Study the Scriptures

Most Armenian Orthodox Christians lack biblical knowledge. This is not because the Bible is not important for them, but because the systematic study of the Scriptures has been neglected for many years. For instance, the Armenian Church worship embraces three scriptural readings during the liturgy: Old Testament books, Epistles, and as the highlight of the word of God, the Gospels are read during the liturgy. However, people have not

been exposed to the Bible as an essential part of their spiritual growth. Thus, I have put much emphasis on Bible studies with my Apostolic disciples beginning in 2001. We would read, discuss, study interpretations, and try to apply the biblical principles into our daily lives. This has opened up an opportunity for them to know the Scriptures and learn how to discern God's will in one's life, or learn how to use Scripture to make ethical decisions in life. To facilitate such discussions, we have used both Apostolic as well as ecumenical church study methods to make the Word relevant to their current context. For instance, to be able to introduce the Christian faith to former atheist young people, we have used the Alpha Course to re-introduce Christianity to them in a non-confrontational and friendly way.<sup>18</sup> Today, our disciples are disciplining others by teaching Scripture to the next generation of young Apostolic Christians in Armenia.<sup>19</sup>

## Worship

Instead of forming a separate worshipping community or a denomination other than the Orthodox Church, I have advocated liturgical worship in the church with our disciples to experience liturgy from within (understand, participate, experience). Every Sunday we spread ourselves throughout the historical monasteries and churches of Saghmosavank, Ohnavank, Karbi, and Mughni in the Aragatsotn Diocese of Armenia. By the year 2004, after three years of faithful service of nearly 30 young lay leaders, NLI was able to organise four Sunday schools in four villages of the Aragatsotn Diocese.

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<sup>18</sup> The Alpha Course is a 15-session practical introduction to the Christian faith through questions and group discussions designed primarily for non-Christians and new believers. Below are some of the testimonies of Alpha Course participants at National Leadership Institute (NLI), Yerevan, Armenia: 'While participating in the Alpha course I started reading the Bible with great love and pleasure. Beforehand I tried but somehow I wasn't able to succeed. First, there were some lines that I either did not understand or could not accept. Besides, the more I read the more confused I was. Now I found out that the Bible gives answers to many questions. This was very impressive and prompted me to read,' Armine Vardanyan, October-December, 2008 class. 'After the Alpha course my faith in God became stronger. I got comprehensive spiritual knowledge. I began to confront difficulties in life more easily', Garnik Ervandyan, October-December, 2008 class. 'During the talk on 'How can I resist evil?' I found many things relevant to me. I made up my mind to step away from the wrongdoings in my life', Hakob Karapetyan, October-January, 2009 class.

<sup>19</sup> NLI has initiated a Discipleship Course by using Gunter Krallmann's "Following Jesus" manual, which has proven to be practical and useful in the Apostolic context. Below are some of the testimonies of the Discipleship Course participants at NLI: 'I made my first spiritual steps when taking part in Alpha course for artists. After the Alpha course I wanted to gain deeper spiritual knowledge and by participating in the Discipleship classes I got what I needed. Now I give much significance to prayer and Bible reading, and can witness with great joy that I have already received many answers to my prayers', Heghine Sargsyan, Discipleship Course for Artists, June 2008 class. 'Beginning from the Alpha course for artists, I often mentioned that I could not understand the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, as a person. But recently during the Discipleship classes I've felt that I have imprudently offended and moved the Holy Spirit away from me. Now I am ready to call and receive the Holy Spirit with a desire to walk under God's leadership', Garik Aghabekyan, Discipleship Course for Artists, June 2008 class.

## **Service**

I have taught young people to serve as Jesus served and lead by serving. I believe Christian witness is service and is materialised by the servant leadership principles of Jesus. For us service meant to serve people in the village communities, help the poor, visit prisoners, go to hospitals, and help the parish priests in their work among children and adults through Sunday school ministries, church choir, Bible studies for adults and children, and more. I have observed that normal Christian life has come back to those churches and communities we worked with by applying Christ's principles of service.

## **Humility and sacrifice**

Christian witness in the Orthodox context requires a great deal of personal humility and sacrifice. One needs to put his/her ego aside, choose to serve, to be identified with the church and the community of faith, and be willing to die to one's self, much like a seed that has fallen on the ground: 'unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain' (John 12: 24).

**Dr Peter Malakyan, Yerevan, Armenia and Azusa, California.**

## 6

# **Identities and Orthodox Mission in Bulgaria in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> and Early 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries**

Svetoslav Ribolov

During the last two decades Bulgaria has changed very rapidly and has already become an open country. In this respect Bulgarian society has encountered a lot of challenges without being prepared for them. One of these challenges has been the swift, massive and free entry of new religious movements. Bulgarian society is very suspicious of a few religious communities and Protestant churches, although they have been in the country since the beginning of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the members of those communities have not usually experienced problems in their everyday life (except for the period of Soviet occupation). The same could be said about the ethnic climate. Unlike the former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria did not choose the path of nationalism. Maybe it is curious for a European citizen to learn that Bulgaria is a country which has a long state history (I do not say ‘national history’ because it is a conglomerate of different Balkan and Asia Minor ethnic components). Closely related is the fact that the population of Bulgaria has well developed skills of adaptation from living for centuries in huge empires. For more than half of its history Bulgaria was part of one or another of these great empires.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, one is able to discover a lot of characteristics in the self-consciousness of modern Bulgarians that correspond with social models from the past.

## **Religious tolerance in the region of south-eastern Europe in the past**

There is a large Muslim community (about 20% of the population) and small Roman Catholic and Protestant congregations in modern Bulgaria. The lack of religious extremism and intolerance, however, is one of the characteristics of this society, although one cannot say that modern Bulgarian society has a developed political consciousness and shares European values. On the contrary, I would say that Bulgaria remains full of prejudice and receives with reservations all new religious movements in the country. On the other hand, there is an absolutely stable tendency in the

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<sup>1</sup> P. Pavlov, ‘Is it possible for a Christian State to exist? The Experience of Byzantium’, in *The Orthodox Church of Bulgaria – Traditions and Presence* (Sofia: St. Kliment Ochridsky University Press, 2009, in Bulgarian), p. 53.



Orthodox Church to preserve a rather passive behaviour in spite of the challenges that come from the Protestant churches. Why is that? How can these two attitudes exist at the same time? In the context of modern Europe these two facts appear contradictory. In my understanding, in order to solve this question one has to turn to the past experience of the society in question.

According to historical records, since the very beginning of its existence (in the seventh century), Bulgaria has been an independent kingdom, practically in very close contact with the Eastern Roman empire. Until that time period it had been a very important province of Byzantium. By adopting Christianity on the official level in the ninth century, the king's court confirmed its natural cultural relationship with Byzantium. The Greek language was official until the early tenth century when it was changed to Slavonic—an act on the part of the Bulgarian king Symeon I emphasising Bulgaria's independence. A century later the country was governed again from Constantinople and during the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) the aristocracy and clergy were in very close relationship with the Byzantine elite. Although the aristocracy was very closely related to the Orthodox Church (in Byzantium and also in Bulgaria), in both countries there were a lot of different religious groups that enjoyed religious rights with different intensities. Until the Ottoman period there were different Gnostic sects, Monophysites, Jews, Roman Catholics, pagans, etc. In the large towns and cities there were regions of different ethnic and religious populations. Although their status was somehow illegal (officially non-Christians were illegal), in practice the governors did not want problems but preferred to have good taxpayers. The only case of a real religious war in Byzantium was the campaign against the Paulicans (a Gnostic sect) in Asia Minor. They refused to obey Constantinople and to pay taxes.<sup>2</sup>

The Ottoman Empire was a natural continuation of the Eastern Roman Empire in south-eastern Europe and Asia Minor. The most recent generation of Turkish and Greek<sup>3</sup> scholars, in their attempt to depart from the narrow framework of nationalistic ideology from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, have revisited the Ottoman Empire as a common past. Even the Turkish scholar Iber Ortali called it the 'last Roman Empire in history'.<sup>4</sup> At the fall of Constantinople (1453) only the ruling dynasty

<sup>2</sup> See D. Obolensky, *The Bogomils. A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism*, trans. from English by Sv. Ribolov (Sofia: Zlatorog, 1998, in Bulgarian), pp. 119-158.

<sup>3</sup> I have to point out that in Bulgaria this 'wind of change' is obvious mainly in the circles of our church historians and unfortunately not in secular circles.

<sup>4</sup> Iber Ortali, *Rediscovery of the Ottoman Empire*, trans. from Turkish by Hysein Mefsim (Plovdiv: Djanet 45, 2007, in Bulgarian), p.187.

was changed—in the place of the Paleologues came the dynasty of Mehmed II.<sup>5</sup> Even a large portion of the administrative staff remained the same.

For six centuries the Ottoman Empire succeeded in securing stability and prosperity over a huge territory on three continents—from Iran to Algeria and from Yemen to Central Europe. Inside of these huge borders lived absolutely different groups among the population. In order to secure order and prosperity the elite of this state discovered one of the most interesting mechanisms of tolerance in the history of the world. It was the so-called '*millet*-system'. This word in Arabic means 'nation' and 'religious group' at the same time. In the Ottoman Empire the word *millet* means *par excellence* 'the nation of the faithful' (i.e. the Muslims). The other big groups – Orthodox Christians, Monophysites (in their *millet* were the Nestorians) and Jews, were separate *millets* in the framework of the state. These communities were recognised as *millets* because of their value for the state. Their leaders were in charge of a lot of administrative and economic prerogatives. For instance, they were charged with gathering the taxes from their *millet*. This practice allowed every *millet* to feel to some extent independent of the central power.<sup>6</sup> For the Orthodox Christians, the so-called *Rummillet* ('the nation of the Romans'), the most important figure was the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. In Ottoman law he was called *Millet bashi* ('the Father of the nation').

The non-Muslim population paid special taxes, which allowed them to confess their religion without any obstacle. The Muslim population was practically one-hundred percent engaged with the army, paramilitary activity and administration. Their duty since the time of the Arab caliphates was to secure peace in the state and in the world.<sup>7</sup>

Since the sixteenth century Christians in the Ottoman Empire had practically no right to take part in the army or to be engaged in administrative services. However, there was full economic and religious freedom. With respect to religious freedom it was restricted just to the borders of the religious groups (*millet*).<sup>8</sup> Usually the cities and towns were separated into religious regions, in *millets*, and the members of the different *millets* met each other only in the market. Interestingly, the villages were usually of one religion and one ethnic group while, in contrast, the provinces of the Ottoman Empire were full of different groups among the

<sup>5</sup> This thesis is popular amongst some modern Greek scholars of the Late Byzantium and Early Ottoman Empire. See Dimitri Katsikis, *L'Empire Ottoman*, Paris 1985, trans. from French by J. Jovcheva (Sofia: IK Kama, 2000, in Bulgarian).

<sup>6</sup> See V. Karavaltchev, 'Tolerance in the Milliet-system of the Ottoman Empire', in *Bogoslovska Missal*, 1-4, 2006 (in Bulgarian), pp. 65 ff.

<sup>7</sup> See S. Ribolov, 'St. John Damascene on Islam', in *Orientalia* 3, No. 1/ 2007 (in Bulgarian), pp. 22-38.

<sup>8</sup> Karavaltchev, p. 67.

population. The scope of this policy was to preserve the economic and administrative balance. In actual practice there were no ethnically and religiously clean regions in the entire empire. In the cities and smaller towns relationships between members of different *millets* were determined by the social framework. They were of a personal character but never an official policy. The local leaders of the different *millets* were responsible to the official power and then to the government in *Constantinie* (as the Turks called Constantinople). They gathered taxes from their ward and applied laws on a local level.

This clever system was borrowed from the Arab caliphates but it was considerably developed and dignified by the Ottomans. Unlike the Arab caliphates since the very beginning of its existence the Ottoman Empire, included in its juridical structure the Orthodox Church. It was one of the most important institutions in the state. Actually, if we think in the paradigm of the 'Eastern Roman Empire', in this case the Ottoman elite merely preserved the heritage of Byzantium. The religious leaders of the Christians were actually part of the Ottoman elite.<sup>9</sup> So, the basis of this original Ottoman approach was 'pragmatism and good will'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in an Empire with a predominantly Christian population, to promote a Muslim-Christian elite was simply a wise policy. Practically, in its long-term existence this state did not organise persecution against persons of different faiths. On the contrary, all the *millets* were stimulated by the law to preserve their religious identities.

When the late Ottoman period is reflected upon in the 'folklore' of the Balkan nations, this late Ottoman period does not produce 'hot' or extreme feelings. Having on hand the historic facts, one can conclude that the violence exercised by Muslims in that period was usually on the local level. It was a result of illegal acts and the corruption which became a serious disease of this state in the late nineteenth century. At that period of time the *millet*-system broke down.

Even if it is not comparable with the modern concept of tolerance, the *millet*-system was far more open than its contemporary system in Europe. It was not merely by chance, once in awhile, or occasionally that many European Jews preferred to move to Thessalonica, Sofia, Smyrna, Constantinople and Plovdiv (Philopoupolis). This model of tolerance was based on enclosing the identities and preserving clear borders of different religious groups. This avoidance of differences was a guarantee of peace and the economic prosperity of the state.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## The *Millet*-system and Orthodox mission

In antiquity and in the Middle Ages the Orthodox Church had very active missions. In Byzantium these missions were closely coordinated with the state. We know about missions among Slavonic tribes, Khazars, Arabs, etc. Also we know about the missions of the Russian Church in the East, in China, Alaska, and even in the Ottoman Empire since the late eighteenth century.

The local Orthodox Churches in south-eastern Europe have not undertaken this kind of activity in the last century. Since the late twentieth century the Greek Church has active missions and also the Romanian Orthodox Church has developed missions in the last two decades. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has been forced by the situation in Turkey to develop its witness mainly in Western Europe and the New World.

What is the reason for the lack of mission in countries like Bulgaria, FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Moldova, etc? Why have the churches in the region not begun this kind of activity? The reason is, in my opinion, the survival on the subliminal level of this same *millet*-system. It seems to be the mechanism that has kept on a constant level the balance between the different ethnic and religious groups in these countries. Except for Greece, not one of these countries has developed either a working civil society or democratic institutions. All of them have serious problems with corruption and criminality. It is worth noting that as for questions related to religious and ethnic tolerance, all these societies behave in a similar manner—they merely avoid all differences and questions on these matters.

These societies have no interest in commenting on these differences. Here we have no theological dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Any contact between these two religions in Bulgaria is reduced to an exchange of civilities. For instance, it is considered something quite usual for our students in the seminaries to take part in different activities of the Muslim community on an official level. The leader of the Muslim community is an honoured guest in the office of the Patriarch.<sup>11</sup> Orthodox Christians accept their Muslim neighbours as very close people, but never try to transgress the borders of the *millet*. Mixed marriages between Muslims and Christians are almost impossible, although such marriages were a practice stimulated by the communist regime in Bulgaria. It is reminiscent of an Ottoman past where in the centre of all the cities in the Ottoman Empire there were places of worship of all the religious groups, so

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<sup>11</sup> See D. Papazova, 'Secularization and Neighbourhood between Orthodoxy and Islam in Bulgaria', in *The Orthodox Church of Bulgaria – Traditions and Presence* (Sofia: St. Kliment Ochridsky University Press, 2009, in Bulgarian), pp. 290-293.

that the population was very well orientated to its religious identity. Practically, mission is impossible in this system, especially in the meaning of this word as used and understood by Protestants. According to Ottoman law it was impossible to transgress the borders of your group. To become Muslim was also very difficult. It was a special privilege because under the law it meant you no longer had to pay special taxes. That is why the procedure of becoming a Muslim was very hard.

In this situation the Orthodox Church did not exercise mission; mission could not exist. The mission of the church for those who were not in membership was the spiritual witness of the members of its body. Usually we see this witness in the acts of the neo-martyrs.<sup>12</sup> In the late Ottoman Empire, when corruption started to distort the Ottoman state and the *millet*-system, many sincere Christians became martyrs for Christ. Having this long-term experience from the Ottoman period, the Orthodox Church, even in the communist period, continued to realise its witness in the faith of the common Christians in the parishes. One could observe that the Orthodox Church continues to react in a similar manner even today in the early twenty-first century.

The massive and powerful outward support of Protestant proselytism in Bulgaria (most often on the level of the pastor) has been explained with the lack of any active position or activities on the part of the mission of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, respectively—they say—‘a lack of religious life’, ‘turning the Christian faith to a dead rite’. It is interesting to mention that, using the same argument, Russian influence invaded Bulgaria in the nineteenth century (mainly through church missions). It stimulated a pan-Slavic and nationalist wave in Bulgaria in the second part of the same century. This influence and the impact of the Western idea of nationhood led to the separation of the Bulgarian Exarchate from the Ecumenical Patriarchate during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Although nationalism became a main point in the mission of the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria in the early twentieth century, it could be understood more as a Western influence than as a part of its Orthodox spiritual tradition. This fact played a rather suppressive role in the spiritual dimensions of church life in Bulgaria.

After World War II Bulgaria experienced very interesting developments. Bulgarian nationalism disappeared during the second part of the twentieth century. The church stopped being just a nationalist organisation. Today, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has a new chance to

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<sup>12</sup> See Konstantinos Nichoritis, *Holy Mountain – Athos and the Bulgarian Neo-Martyrs* (Sofia: BAN, 2001, in Bulgarian).

go back to its original spiritual roots, which have been suppressed for a century. This revival of spiritual life has to be concentrated around the parish and the witness of ordinary Christians. In this regard it should be stressed that keeping the peace and balance of our society can be achieved only through respecting the religious rights and dignity of all religious communities.

**Svetoslav Ribolov, Sofia, Bulgaria**

## 7

## **Christian Mission in Post-Communism: Missiological Implications and the Bulgarian Context**

Viktor Kostov

‘I personally am an atheist, but will always support Eastern Orthodoxy because I am aware that only it can unite the Bulgarians and help them come out of the black hole in which they find themselves at the moment. My personal feelings and beliefs are of no importance when the survival of the state is at stake’. This opinion posting, placed on the Internet under one of my articles critiquing the government for its intervention in the ecclesiastical affairs of the Orthodox Church, expresses clearly the dilemma of religion, Christianity, and its different forms in the post-communist context of Bulgaria.

### **Purpose, terminology and scope**

My goal in this article is to discuss the categories of freedom of conscience, religion and the church-state relationship from a missiological perspective. I will present the thesis that in post-communist Bulgaria, the government still tries to play a defining role in the formation of national ideology and thus attempts to govern religious belief. In such attempts the idea of a canonical territory, or the limitations on free speech called for by any anti-proselytism sentiments, are welcomed by the state in its tendency to elevate itself above society and become a totalitarian structure. I will also suggest that there is missiological significance in paying attention to the church-state model and issues of freedom of conscience and religion in the post-communist context.

Terminological clarification is needed here. I use the term ‘Orthodox’ in the paper to denote adherents of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. However, many uses of the term do not refer to believers, or church-goers who visit Eastern Orthodox churches and services, but depict a national and ethnic adherence, often with nationalistic overtones.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Parush Parushev, ‘Narrative Paradigms of Emergence’, *Religion in Eastern Europe* XXV, no.2 (2005), pp. 1-39.

very term ‘orthodox’ in the larger practice of Christianity is used to denote faithfulness to doctrine and practice. But faithful to what: the biblical canon or church tradition? Faithfulness to the Holy Spirit or to the church hierarchy? We are aware that Eastern Orthodoxy is faithful to church tradition and the ‘guided reading’ of the Scriptures; whereas evangelicalism stresses the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*. Thus, if we want to refer to the practical use of Christian orthodoxy, we are prohibited from doing so in order to avoid confusion of the use of the term in relation to the Eastern Orthodox Church. Even this terminological disclaimer reveals how difficult the discussion of and with a church institution can be whose fundamental premise for its self-definition is the assumption that it is the only institution that can represent ultimate truth.<sup>2</sup> The task becomes daunting when we establish that Orthodoxy also has a political claim which is not concerned with faith but with its close relationship to the secular government.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, we must be ready to critically deconstruct certain theological presuppositions as we discuss mission, civil and religious freedom, proselytism and freedom of conscience in the post-communist world. One example is the term ‘Orthodox countries’.

## Canonical territory, freedom of religion and proselytism

In order to establish a comprehensible framework for discussion, I will give the working definitions of some terms. ‘Canonical territory’ is present when we have a religion which claims as adherents all subjects within a given geographical area controlled by a government. This idea supports the historical presumption that all Bulgarians (or Armenians, Serbs, Russians or Romanians, etc.) are established Orthodox (as in other countries the population is classified by the official authorities as unanimously Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, and so on). This presumption adopted by the state and the public does not take into account the real spiritual experiences and convictions of individuals and ‘missionaries are treated as invaders’.<sup>4</sup>

‘Freedom of religion’ is the right of people to choose for themselves their faith in God, based on the unhindered gathering of information on which to base their belief. ‘For themselves’ does not mean that a person

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 250.

<sup>3</sup> See Nikolas Gvosdev, *An Examination of Church-State Relations in the Byzantine and Russian Empires with an Emphasis on Ideology and Models of Interaction* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001); Lee Trepanier, ‘Nationalism and Religion in Russian Civil Society: An Inquiry into the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience,’ in *Civil Society and the Search for Justice in Russia*, edited by N G A C Marsh (New York: Lexington Books, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Tim Grass, ‘Orthodoxy and the Doctrine of the Church’ in Ian M. Randall, ed., *Baptists and the Orthodox Church: On the Way to Understanding* (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), pp. 5-14, p. 12.



creates his or her own god; on the contrary, religious belief is always formed by, and aimed at community and a faith that is meaningful and proven by experience and history. But the historical and communal aspect of faith is not meant to eradicate individual freedom. The latter is given so that the individual can reach internal conviction independently, so that belief is motivated and thoughtfully weighed, not imposed on a person because of fear or violence.

‘Proselytism’ has a negative connotation and is generally used by religious and government leaders who control a certain canonical territory. The term is meant to denote the activities of representatives from faiths or religions which are not recognised as the dominant one. The activities envisioned include the presentation of ‘foreign’ beliefs to the people in the ‘canonical territory’.<sup>5</sup>

It is only logical that in a given ‘canonical territory’ there is the presumption that everyone is born with a certain ‘faith affiliation’. From a theological and biblical perspective, this argument is untenable, and I would even say, preposterous. Faith is not race, ethnicity, gender or even culture; it is the result of personal involvement in the process of searching, understanding and accepting God who is invisible and is Spirit. This search for God may be influenced by the family and social processes of the person’s environment. But to limit human spiritual searching because of political, ethnic, territorial and state interests is tyranny, which at least from a Christian and biblical perspective, is not justified. This tyranny, at the same time, is powerless in many ways, because God reveals himself to people, despite the efforts of people to reformulate faith in God (Acts 4:31). Faith is a matter of internal conviction, according to the gospel, which does not belong to control by the state (Caesar) (John 6; Matthew 22:21).

People are not born with their religion, but build their convictions on the basis of the culture that has formed them as children and youth; then in later years they may choose to contest the worldview imposed upon them during earlier years. A similar stance, but starting from another point of view, is the position of secular humanism, which protects basic individual human rights.

## **Human rights and religious liberty**

Freedom of conscience and religion began to be more clearly defined as socio-political categories during the Enlightenment period which places them historically as a development of Western thought. Freedom of religion is only one subcategory of the attempt at universal human justice,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

known as ‘universal human rights’. These rights were established in international treaties and documents of the human global community since its emergence in an organised form in the twentieth century. Such is the case with the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations. Article 18 defines the right to freedom of faith, its expression and the right to change one’s faith. Although the UDHR is a pretentious document (and it cannot be otherwise since the claim of the proponents of the document is to establish some form of ‘universal human justice’), it still remains a fundamental reference point for understanding and claiming the basic right of a free belief in God.

Human rights are also viewed as a biblical category, emerging in the act of creation and the dignity of man (and woman) created in God’s image.<sup>6</sup> Although the idea of human dignity is found in the Bible the term ‘human rights’ is not found in the Scriptures.<sup>7</sup> Humanists and atheists, especially regarding freedom of religion, have their own claim on religious liberty. Franklin Gamwell, for example, insists that all religion must be excluded from public and political life because it is ‘irrational’.<sup>8</sup> Hamburger’s research reveals that the motivation of Thomas Jefferson, the founding father of the American constitution, for insisting on a ‘wall of separation of church and state’ was rather to protect his own disagreement with the clerical establishment than to protect religion.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, freedom of religion must be considered with an accompanying term, ‘freedom of conscience’. The meaning of such a differentiation is that one is also free to not believe in God, according to their choice of conviction. The humanist interpretation of ‘freedom of conscience and religion’ is, in fact, the protection of freedom *from* religion. Freedom of conscience is the ability to hold any conviction; freedom of religion is the ability to hold and express one’s faith in God.

Freedom of religion and conscience constitutes a complex category because it contains in itself theological, legal, political, social and cultural subcategories. The Bulgarian Constitutional Court issued an interpretive decision addressing the complexity of religious freedom as a legal category in the early 1990s. Religious liberty is complex because it consists of the internal right of freedom of conscience, to choose whom to worship, and several rights to externally express that internal faith.<sup>10</sup> These are the

<sup>6</sup> Max L Stackhouse, *Creeeds, Society, and Human Rights* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Eugene Heideman, ‘The Missiological Significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,’ *Missiology: An International Review*, XXVIII, V, pp. 163-76.

<sup>8</sup> Franklin I Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom: Modern Politics and the Democratic Resolution* (New York: State University of New York, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Reshenie No. 5/ 11.06.1992 po konstitutsionno delo No. 11 ot 1992 (*Darzhaven Vestnik*, broj 49/ 16.16.1992) [Constitutional Court Decision No. 5 of 11 June 1992 on Constitutional Court Case No. 11 of 1992, published in *State Gazette*, Issue 49 of 16 June 1992].

freedoms of speech and expression, receiving and gathering information, of association (forming of a religious entity) and gathering indoors and outdoors with or without government permission. Thus, when we speak of freedom of conscience and religion we must be able to grasp the framework of church-state relations.

## Church and state

The model of a church to state relationship is also critically important for the assessment of the level of freedom the church is granted to worship and do mission. Johannes Verkuyl accurately notes that regardless of the political regime, the mission of the church to preach the good news of Christ cannot be reconsidered or redefined.<sup>11</sup> An example along those lines is presented by the apostles. They taught honour to the king and respect to all authority, yet resolutely disobeyed official orders not to preach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4, 5). However, the missiological analysis of the actual political order in which the church operates may help reshape and reinvigorate the actual missionary vision of the church.

David Bosch presents five different models of church-state relations which significantly differ in how the church engages in mission:

- a. Constantinian model—presupposes a close alliance between a particular religious organisation and the state;
- b. Pietist model—the religious organisation and powers that be are fully separated;
- c. Reformist model—mission is more than soul-winning and church-planting; includes social and moral uplift and seeks structural changes;
- d. Liberationist model—rejects both Constantinianism and Reformist confrontation with the forces of evil, revolutionist mentality;
- e. Anabaptist model—the church is a prophetic community, separated from any government favour, and by its very existence, even under oppressive political regimes, testifies of the Kingdom of God.<sup>12</sup>

These models reflect theological convictions and the historical social context in which a church operates. However, they do not offer a clear-cut formula since they overlap. In more repressive political regimes the church remains a prophetic insertion in a corrupt and dark society. In societies

<sup>11</sup> Johannes Verkuyl, 'The Biblical Notion of Kingdom: Test of Validity for Theory of Religion' in *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium*, ed. by C. Van Engen, D. S. Gilliland and P. Pierson. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> David J. Bosch, 'God's Reign and the Rulers of This World: Missiological Reflections on Church-State Relationships' in *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium*, edited by C. V. Engen, D. S. Gilliland and P. Pierson. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999).

more favourable toward the church's influence, one may see Bosch's concern with the church identifying itself too closely with the state and thus losing its prophetic ministry. Bosch's main conclusion is that the church must preserve its witness in a way that provides the uniting factor of values that any society needs to survive. Yet he is wary of too close a relationship between church and state where the government can influence the church's definition of mission. Christendom (Constantinianism), where canonical territory is a part of the church's domain, is a defunct context for the missionary church.<sup>13</sup>

Walter Pilgrim studies the New Testament models of church and state relations. His conclusions lead him to establish a threefold general 'formula' of church and state. In the life and ministry of Jesus he sees 'critical distancing'; in the letters of the apostles the pattern is 'subordination' of the church to the state; and from the Book of Revelation Pilgrim extracts the model of 'resistance'. Certain adjustments must be made to Pilgrim's conclusions. For example, the term 'subordination' does not depict well the respectful attitude to which Christians are called in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. Acts 4 and 5 are examples that in regards to the question of to whom the Christian's conscience and its free speech expression belong, the answer is, as far as preaching is concerned, that Caesar has no right over that area. Thus the term 'subordination', which expresses full obedience in all matters, neglects the area of free conscience and speech which are preserved as the untouchable domain of believers.

Pilgrim's study however is exhaustive enough to trust one of his main conclusions: the New Testament does not provide any definitive model of church and state relations. The church must evaluate its own political context and define its stance toward the government based on the principles provided in the New Testament.

Bosch's and Pilgrim's views are complemented by Carter's and Fergusson's conclusions which focus on contemporary developments. The former insists that Christendom in the West is in a state of decay and the church must prepare for redefining its place in society:

[Christendom] is the concept of Western civilisation as having a religious arm (the church) and a secular arm (civil government), both of which are united in their adherence to the Christian faith, which is seen as the so-called soul of Europe or the West...Within this Christian civilisation, the state and the church have different roles to play, but, since membership in

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

both is coterminous, both can be seen as aspects of one unified reality—Christendom.<sup>14</sup>

The idea of a ‘Christian society’ or a ‘Christian state’ in the West is further challenged by Fergusson: ‘The complex interweaving of systems that constitute a modern western society has ended the earlier alignment of ecclesiastical and political rule’.<sup>15</sup> Yoder poses a poignant question and responds to it: ‘Why then should there be anything wrong with Christianity’s becoming an official ideology? ... In the experience of the Christian community... the only way in which the faith can become the official ideology of power elite in a given society is if Jesus Christ ceases to be completely Lord’.<sup>16</sup>

This up-to-date Western development cannot be ignored when we look into Eastern nations, especially when we are tempted to term them ‘Orthodox nations’. Any formulaic mission strategy tends to be incomplete or reductionist; truly strategic missional thinking is rather a faithful sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and the mandates of Scripture.<sup>17</sup> This is also true when we think of a missiologically viable church and state formula.

### **Is post-communist Bulgaria an ‘Orthodox country?’**

We may take note of the revival of the concept of ‘Orthodox peoples’ and ‘Orthodox countries’ and the terminology in the post-communist milieu but, in fact, there is a large disparity between public use of words and reality. In ‘Orthodox’ countries, there is no clear distinction between Orthodox theology as doctrine and practice and the term ‘Orthodox’ as a national identity and as a political stimulant of government self-confidence. This statement refers to the Bulgarian context as well. Samuel Huntington by no accident affords himself generalising statements and categorisations, lumping together the East—both Islam and Orthodoxy—in the same category, identifying an entire society with a single religion.<sup>18</sup> Huntington’s wide sweep naturally omits the details—namely that despite the prevailing ‘political vision of Orthodoxy’ in the so-called ‘Orthodox’ countries (formerly communist) there are other cultural currents. Among them are the

<sup>14</sup> Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), p. 78.

<sup>15</sup> David Fergusson, *Church, State, and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 192.

<sup>16</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 85.

<sup>17</sup> Wilbert Shenk, “Three Studies of Mission Strategy: Transforming Mission” in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. by W. R. Shenk and P. F. Penner (Prague: IBTS and Neufeld Verlag, 2007), p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

tendency of post-communist societies to seek association with the markets and values of the West.

The next important limitation to the term ‘Orthodox state’ or ‘Orthodox nation’ is that the rubber-stamp use of terminology leads to serious conceptual and mental confusion. What is an ‘Orthodox country?’ Are Orthodox priests in such a nation government officials at the same time, as in the era of *Rum Millet*?<sup>19</sup> Or are they officials appointed by the Council of Ministers and the local government? Does the public administration by law serve only people who have declared loyalty to the Orthodox religion? Or is it that only people who have declared their loyalty to the Orthodox Church, (and what does ‘loyalty’ mean anyway—only baptised members or regular visitors of liturgies?), may be elected to state-leadership positions? In this last case, Orthodoxy should be termed the official state religion. But since Orthodoxy is only ‘the traditional’ religion, such a formulation would violate the constitution and the principle of pluralism in a democratic society (Art. 11, Para. 2). Finally, can we draw a sign of equality between ‘Orthodox Church’ and ‘nation’; or between ‘state’ and ‘society’?

Bulgaria’s adoption of the European Convention for the Protection of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms which lists in Article 9 the right to believe, express one’s belief and change one’s beliefs, speaks to the opposite. In this secular document one can discover not only the right of human beings to believe in God and tell others about it, but also to convert and change one’s religious or atheist convictions. The accession of Bulgaria into the EU in 2007 put even more starkly before the government and society the need to evaluate its attitudes toward human rights and in particular freedom of religion and conscience.

The constitutional claim that the ‘traditional religion in Bulgaria is Eastern Orthodoxy’ (Art. 13, Para. 3), also produces difficult-to-distinguish categories in the hard-to-find balance between pluralism and ‘national unity’.<sup>20</sup> This claim has its limitations placed by the constitutional prohibition against the imposition of a state ideology (and ‘religion’ by analogy) (Art. 11, Para. 2). However, given the low level of religious education of the population in the post-communist situation, and the obvious appetite of former communists to take advantage of the dominant role of Orthodoxy in the minds of people as a political and national uniting factor, the fine distinction between ‘traditional’ and ‘mandatory and

<sup>19</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 98.

<sup>20</sup> The Russian Orthodox Church expressed its struggle with the concept in a special document: Laurie Johnston, ‘Religious Liberty in Comparative Perspective: The Catholic Church’s Theological Odyssey and the Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church’, *Religion in Eastern Europe* XXVI, no 4, (2006), pp. 15-31.

official' religion becomes even more nebulous. The constitutionally mandated separation between state and religious institutions (Art. 13 para.2) and the ban on the use of religion for political (government) objectives are also violated by the authorities without any inhibition.<sup>21</sup> We may conclude that 'proselytism' and 'canonical territory' are categories which in their constrictive meaning come into sharp conflict with freedom of conscience and religion, as these are established in the legal framework of the utmost level in Bulgaria.

However, assertions that Bulgaria is an Orthodox country have their undeniable basis. We will not delve into common historical facts about the christening of the Bulgarian people, and the role of the Orthodox Church as a quasi-governmental and national institution which maintained the Bulgarian spirit throughout the centuries. The following table shows that law-making in the modern history of Bulgaria is marked by the pursuit of establishing a single, corporate conscience, in which freedom of the individual is of secondary importance.

**Table 1**  
**Freedom of belief and conscience**  
**in modern Bulgarian legislative history**

1878 Constitutional Monarchy	1949 Communism	1971 Communism	1991 Post-communist period	2002 Post-communist period
Turnovo Constitution	Denominations Act	Constitution	Constitution	Law on Religious Confessions
Art. 37: 'The <b>ruling faith</b> in the Bulgarian Principality is the Orthodox-Christianity of Eastern confession'.	Art. 3: 'The Bulgarian Orthodox Church is the <b>traditional religious confession</b> of the Bulgarian people, and as such, in its form, content and spirit, could be a people's democratic church'.	Art. 1(2): 'The <b>leading role</b> in society and the government (state) belongs to the Bulgarian communist party'.	Art. 13 (3): 'Eastern Orthodox Christianity shall be considered the <b>traditional religion</b> in the Republic of Bulgaria'.	Art. 10 (1): 'The traditional religion in the Republic of Bulgaria is Eastern Orthodoxy. It plays a <b>historic role in Bulgarian statehood</b> and has current significance in the state's life'.

<sup>21</sup> *Case of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Metropolitan Inokentiy) and Others vs. Bulgaria*, nos. 412/03 and 35677/04, European Court of Human Rights, 2009. (Accessed online, April 9, 2010  
<http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?item=1&portal=hbkm&action=html&highlight=alternative%20%7C%20synod&sessionid=50894101&skin=hudoc-en>)

In this sense, yes, we do have an Orthodox state. The legislature (one of the forms of state power) seems to have always striven to steer the conscience of the people toward the field of Orthodox doctrine as a state-sponsored, religio-political ideology. After WWII the centrality of Orthodoxy as a faith promoted by the state was superseded legally by atheistic communism. But where is the liberating transcendence of a personal relationship with God in these forms of political ethno-religion?

## Mechanism of totalitarianism

The idea of the national state represents a form of government which stems from the ancient tradition of adding spiritual meaning to the use of secular power. It is also a platform for interlacing Enlightenment humanistic ideals and the nationalism of emerging nations, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some may see a benevolent force behind the attempt of the nation-state to unify different groups.<sup>22</sup> Craig Carter's view is less attracted to the possibilities offered by the nation-state formation: 'The nation-state demands the absolute sacrifice from us. Just as Jesus demands that we make ourselves ready to die for him, the nation-state also demands that we make ourselves ready to die for it'.<sup>23</sup> Lesslie Newbigin's treatment is significant in its simplicity: 'The nation-state has taken the place of God as the source to which we look for happiness, health and welfare'.<sup>24</sup> It is unarguable, however, that the nation-state has revealed a modern capacity for attempts at total social and ideological control. Earlier in the twentieth century Franklin Littell reinforced this view—he saw the role of the totalitarian state in using individual appeal to transfer loyalty of members of the Christian community to loyalty to the political community which shares a 'political faith'. Littell quotes a fragment of the Nazi programme on 'religious liberty': 'We demand the freedom of all religious confessions in the state, in so far as they do not imperil its stability or offend against the ethical and moral senses of the German race'.<sup>25</sup> Religion can support a totalitarian state ideology if pushed enough toward identification with nationalistic values.

Totalitarianism without the use or the threat of state force is impossible. Thus, the mechanism of totalitarianism necessarily involves the process of turning the state from a governing civil authority into an idolatrous, transcendent entity. All tyrannical government regimes,

<sup>22</sup> Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, 'A Timely Conversation with The Desire of the Nations on Civil Society, Nation and State' in *A Royal Priesthood?: The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan*, ed. by C. Bartolomew, J. Chaplin, R. Song and A. Wolters. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture*, p. 104.

<sup>24</sup> Newbigin, cited in Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture*, p. 104.

<sup>25</sup> Franklin H. Littell, *The Free Church* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1957), p. 92.



including those most emblematic of the twentieth century, National Socialism and communism, exhibit an attraction toward the state system as an ideological tool. The foundation of communism and totalitarianism is a state-imposed ideology and an idolatrous atheistic system of worship.

Idolatry is the worst sin of all, because it moves God to the periphery of our lives and puts something else in his place. It gives to something else the glory that should be God's alone...The modern world is no less given over to idolatry than the ancient one; it is just that its cruder forms were more prevalent then.<sup>26</sup>

A totalitarian state creates a totalitarian society, the result of which is totalitarian thinking. The method for creating a totalitarian society contains two main components: (1) violence against opponents of those of different convictions and (2) manipulation of the masses through propaganda. Thus, through the inculcation of fear totalitarian leaders create conditions for self-censorship and the reformulation of truth. By means of propaganda tyrants replace terminology and mental categories for people and tailor their views according to their own desired ideology. David Bosch even thinks that the development of technology makes all modern states totalitarian to a great extent.<sup>27</sup>

Naturally, the abuse of truth on a large scale leads to the rewriting of history. These are the preferred methods of the 'favourite' tyrants and leaders of totalitarian ideologies and states: Lenin argued that a lie repeated many times becomes truth (for the gullible only—but in truth, no, it doesn't!) and Hitler realised the need to create a matrix, a new virtual reality, in the minds of the people through propaganda of his own vision of the 'truth'.<sup>28</sup> This matrix has a strict hierarchy of the quality of the human person: Aryans are a higher race, the Jews are not human beings and therefore subject to destruction, and Slavs are sub-human and must be ruled and, when necessary, destroyed. The Communists had their 'class enemy', 'the capitalist' and 'the kulak' for the formation of their own ideology of hate.

It would not be difficult to imagine modern Bulgarian media mini-ideologists of the 'totality' of state, nation and religion, calling on 'the Orthodox' Bulgarian people to be cleansed of impurities, sects and other

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<sup>26</sup> Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagle's Wings*, ed. by J. A. Motyer and J. R. Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1996), p.180.

<sup>27</sup> Bosch, 'God's Reign and the Rulers of This World'.

<sup>28</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* n.d. [cited April 1 2009]. Available from [www.hitler.org/writings/Mein\\_Kampf/mkv1ch06.html](http://www.hitler.org/writings/Mein_Kampf/mkv1ch06.html).

harmful elements.<sup>29</sup> Post-communist Bulgarian media overflows with reports of this sort without paying attention to the fact that the fight against 'sectarianism' is actually a struggle for dominance of the total and totalitarianism.<sup>30</sup> Part of the propaganda is that 'sects' (different religions), which are seen as breaking away from the 'whole', the 'total', are labelled 'totalitarian'.

It is not accidental that the Communists, National Socialists, Fascist and radical Islamic fundamentalists have all relied on propaganda to create public awareness and an atmosphere in which tyranny and totalitarianism are presented as necessary. One of the most notorious totalitarian leaders of all time illustrates this in his reflections on propaganda, which he thinks should not be directed at intellectuals, but at the masses:

The function of propaganda does not lie in the scientific training of the individual, but in calling the masses' attention to certain facts, processes, necessities, etc., whose significance is thus for the first time placed within their field of vision. The whole art consists in doing this so skilfully that everyone will be convinced that the fact is real, the process necessary, the necessity correct, etc.<sup>31</sup>

Freedom of conscience and faith are excluded as values in this model of the battle for the mind and soul of the people.

Charles G Robertson, observing from a close historical proximity the emergence of the twentieth century totalitarian states, gives three of their important features: first, the state is seen as a transcendent entity and the unity it promotes confers on itself an 'absolute value', intrinsic and inherent in itself, with which empirical facts are to harmonise. 'The state, in fact, is a moral absolute of eternal value; arising from the nature of things...As Mussolini put it: 'The state is the synthesis of all the material and non-material values of the race'.<sup>32</sup> The end of the state is the achievement of this synthesis of values.<sup>33</sup> The second consequence, Robertson points out, is that the totalitarian state demands, and is empowered by, a specific approach to government: 'unqualified allegiance of the citizens to the state makes it a Totalitarian State'.<sup>34</sup> The definition that emerges in the text is that 'the State is, therefore, a unifying corporative organism of differentiated functional capacities organised under the supreme, unifying and equalising control of

<sup>29</sup> Mladena Germanova i Desislava Panajotova, 'Secti Zaribjavat s Magii I Hipnoza' [Sects lure with magic and hypnosis], *Telegraf*, 2008, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Tanya Antonova, 'Balgaria Mishena na Sektite: Evangelistite Zaribjavat Nashentsi po Radioto' [Bulgaria is the target of a sect: Evangelicals lure our people over the radio], *Telegraph*, 2007, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Ch. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Sir Charles Grant Robertson, *Religion and the Totalitarian State: The Social Service Lecture, 1937* (London: The Epworth Press, 1937), p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Benito Mussolini, 'The Fascist State versus the Individual' in *Man and Society: Freedom and Liberty*, ed. by J. P. Resch and J. K. Huckaby (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co, 1975).

<sup>34</sup> Robertson, *Religion and the Totalitarian State*, p. 18.

the Leader (*Duce, Führer*), who speaks the mind of the state and is its consummate expression'.<sup>35</sup> Finally, the writer sees a common trend among all totalitarian states of his time (Russia, Turkey, Germany and Italy)—they all came about as the result of a revolution bringing change from a past humiliating national experience.

In totalitarianism the state achieves an overwhelming presence in society to the point of identification with it.<sup>36</sup> The state permeates the whole society, and controls all activities. The public recognises the state as a major source of security, progress and protection, giving it respect and a transcendent admiration bordering on idolatry.

To sum up briefly, tyrannical totalitarianism acts through the inculcation of fear, hatred and violence and through manipulation. (Fear is imaginary and usually strongly enhanced by propaganda. The popular phraseology used by the Bulgarian media to denote non-Orthodox groups includes such examples as, 'the sects will steal the souls of the young', 'totalitarian sects', 'lie in wait around the street corner', 'luring', etc.) Once the people lose their sense of reality and dignity under this influence, the masses who have adopted these values as good for society identify themselves with tyranny and agree with its methods. Upon agreeing with tyranny they begin to implement it in favour of the tyrannical regime.

In these circumstances, the human conscience is put on trial to either totally subjugate itself to the popular social and governmental demand to conform or to risk and hold on to freedom and be declared a 'sect' which is separate from the whole. Naturally, this would lead such a person to suffer the consequences for having 'unconventional' beliefs. Thus, the totalitarian mechanism is largely an attitude, and is not solely imposed by state coercion. Of course, the principles of the tyrannical mechanism offered here should serve as a starting point for reflections on the Bulgarian post-communist context.

## **The church as a deterrent**

This grim picture is relieved by our awareness of the church as a prophetic and free community in the larger society, which could be tyrannical or free, in a political sense. Robertson describes the church as a society of free people with a transcendent relationship with God, who form a community based on their beliefs and faith.<sup>37</sup> This definition contains the transcendent aspects of faith, which immediately transforms the religious community

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Robertson, *Religion and the Totalitarian State*.

into a group largely independent from public ideology. In this sense, tyrannical or free, the society in which the church dwells forms, in part, the worldview of the people in the church. People therefore are not only persons carrying the marks of surrounding circumstances: political, social, economic, etc. Just the opposite, the main feature of their conscience is their faith in God, who is a transcendent Spirit unfathomable and uncontrolled by the limited perceptions of the five senses and the four dimensions of the visible world: height, length, width and time.

Martinus Kuitert, a Dutch theologian, agrees with Robertson—the church has a social element in itself that makes it a political category, but only somewhat.<sup>38</sup> In essence, society cannot dictate to the church the latter's nature and formation. The world lacks the categories of faith, but the church has spiritual autonomy from the secular power.

According to Robertson there are several principles that distinguish the church from any ordinary public organisation: (1) the equality of all in dignity and value before God; (2) the ultimate goal of the church is outside of the visible world; (3) the church has a 'spiritual autonomy' without which it 'ceases to be the church'; (4) government has no authority to grant any spiritual power or authority to the church: 'it can only recognise, but not confer, the inherent rights of the Christian Church to spiritual autonomy'; (5) the sphere of the church and that of the state are different: the former extends into the field of 'individual conscience and the relation of the human soul to God' while the latter 'is the maintenance of the political order of its members and their obligations to obey the laws and officers within the sphere of the state's civil jurisdiction'; and (6) rejects any identification between state and society, at least, because society includes the Christian community.<sup>39</sup>

Here is the fundamental misunderstanding between the world of the secular and the world of faith. Agnostics and atheists think that believers worship some unreal god and are delusional. This leads to a condescending attitude towards religion and religious people. But for people who believe, the situation is the reverse—unbelievers have no receptors for spiritual truths and experiences that are only achievable in the world of faith (1 Cor. 2). Thus, the secular faction sees in religion only a group of people who, because of inadequacy, cannot be full members of society. Believers see it in exactly the opposite fashion—they are aware that not fewer, but more resources are available to them to be full citizens, precisely because they have the fear of God who gives wisdom and self-control, qualities absent among the godless.

<sup>38</sup> H. Martinus Kuitert, *Everything is Politics but Politics is not Everything: A Theological Perspective on Faith and Politics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986).

<sup>39</sup> Robertson, *Religion and the Totalitarian State*, pp. 22-24.

Only Christianity (non-Roman and non-Eastern Orthodox) respects religious liberty. What gives rise to anxiety is that, apart from this one form of the Christian consciousness [non-Roman] no other religion, no other society, no other ideology, is prepared to grant to religious liberty its proper position as a supreme and sacrosanct principle. All religions and ideologies tend at one moment or another to attach importance to unity, to conformity, to the total claims of a civilization or of a historical religion, or simply to the practical liberty of a man to earn his daily bread.<sup>40</sup>

Namely the practice of the Christian hope for life that continues after the end of the earthly one, as well as the fear of God, which is ‘the beginning of all wisdom’, gives the church the ability to be a prophetic corrective against the tyranny of self-obsessed leaders, ideologists of violence and manipulation, and government totalitarian structures. The correction does not happen, however, by the participation of the church, as such, in government, but rather by its holding a different type of position in society. The church is a society which is a counterpoint to the lies, greed, envy, hatred, passions and intrigues that make up all other societies. The task of the church is to assess the secular government and by using its non-revolutionary but powerful spiritual weapons—preaching and prayer—to keep the fire of truth and freedom burning even in the most tyrannical societies.

Therefore the church, which identifies blindly with political power in order to preserve itself as an institution, ceases to be corrective and a conveyor of freedom. Without applying any checks against the aspiration for political power it has all the capacity to become an ally of tyranny and turn into a totalitarian institution itself.

## **Bringing together Christian mission and freedom of religion**

Thus we reach the conclusion that the institutional church, bound by policy and not by the essence and spirit of the gospel is more conducive to state ideology and policy, is not a free community and a corrective to violence and tyranny. In this role such a church, regardless of whether it is Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant, easily becomes the controller of the ‘canonical territory’ in order to maintain its influence and nature of a quasi-religious political institution. It is however true that, regardless of its denomination, a church that accepts biblical teachings on ecclesial matters

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<sup>40</sup> Giovanni Miegge, *Religious Liberty* (New York: Association Press, 1957), p. 27.

despite its denominational baggage can be transformed into a community that encourages personal freedom through personal faith in God. Such a church can also play the role of a public corrective exactly because of this faith and its inherent freedom: 'The Christian notion of religious liberty by no means includes any element of indifferentism, relativism or syncretism. Christians consider God's revelation as the absolute and unique truth, but demand religious liberty for all, including erring men, in spite of that absoluteness'.<sup>41</sup>

Freedom of conscience and religion are embedded in Christ's great missionary commissioning of the apostles and disciples to preach to all nations. Put differently, the preaching of the 'good news' with 'all authority' does not contain coercion, but respect toward the choice of the other, without fear for the preacher's reputation and success.

Then Jesus came to them and talked to them, saying: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you through all the days to the end of the century. [Amen] (Matthew 28:18-20).

Thus, the missionary effort is meant to challenge respectfully but firmly the very existence of the category 'canonical territory' as a bulwark of some 'default' territorial spirituality.<sup>42</sup> With this view in mind, 'proselytism' is not a negative term. The sharing of ideas and beliefs becomes an opportunity to expand one's worldview or a way to battle mental strongholds imposed on the people by fear and authoritarianism. Precisely here is the cross-point between missionary work, the preaching of the Bible as God's word, on the one hand, and the guarantees to respect freedom of conscience, religion and expression, on the other, enshrined in secular and humanistic documents and laws.

Each missionary-minded church then has two main characteristics: respecting the freedom of the recipient, while also protecting its right to preach the faith. This position is contrary to that of the 'religious institution' which bulwarks its canonical territory: not respecting the rights of its followers to receive information about other treatments of Christianity as it considers them too immature to form their own opinion; and hence to not lose them as church adherents. It opposes free speech, freedom of conscience and the legal system that protects individual rights.

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<sup>41</sup> Angel Francisco Carillo de Albornoz, *The Basis for Religious Liberty* (New York: Association Press, 1963.), p. 147.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, p. 54.

In this sense the ‘good news’ should remain ‘good’ and not be imposed by force or government coercion.<sup>43</sup> In Christ we see a personal identity that does not hesitate in the fulfilment of divine purposes. Christ sought to convince, not by imposing his will on others, but rather by imposing his will upon himself: to obey the specific mission and will of God. Such obedience is possible because Christian hope envisions the full realisation of God's kingdom in the unfolding of human history, in which Christ will not be the Suffering Servant, but rather the ruler who will exercise his visible reign over human civilisation.

Due to an absence of such hope for the future, any religious and ideological doctrine which does not put its trust in the authentic Christ will sooner or later resort to the power of government coercion, or totalitarianism, in order to realise its kingdom in the minds of people in the structures of society. Christian faith has a duty to stay away from any attempt to use public authorities to establish the principles of God's kingdom by compulsion. At the same time, we should not live under the illusion that the struggle for salvation and absolute truth, hence the battle for freedom, will cease and perfect peace will somehow be established, before the final consummation of the world as we know it.

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<sup>43</sup> Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, p. 55.

## 8

# **The Importance of Understanding Human Rights and Religious Freedom in Bulgaria**

Kameliya Slavcheva

Human rights and religious freedom are the basis for peaceful mutual existence in every area of life. These rights and freedoms begin with the family, church and society then continue all the way to national and international politics. To strengthen the position of human rights and religious freedom is one of the major tasks of education. The growing importance of these problems is obvious. During the communist regime human rights were not highly valued. Not only were they violated daily, but all information regarding them was intentionally concealed.

According to Christian teaching, freedom is the basis for having justice and peace in society. It is revealed through the basic individual rights of a person. This freedom defines the dignity of the human person, and it is looked upon as a foundation for the judicial system. The importance of human rights is the basis for establishing laws in the state, for the legal norms of public life, and is an expression of justice in society.

After the dramatic events of the last decade of the twentieth century when Central and Eastern Europe were shaken by radical historical changes, the shift in social structures and cultural processes appeared to be reason for spiritual renewal of universal human values. After the 'joy' and 'hope' caused by the victory of the long desired democracy, came a time of 'disappointment'. It was also a time to analyse events and to reconsider values.

The sad picture of despair, scepticism, and secularism in Eastern European societies in recent years can be characterised by the number of events that showed lack of spirituality, dehumanisation, apathy, poverty and so on. Individual Christians and Christian communities, groups and movements on a global scale expressed their concern over the de-sanctification of human values, the slow descent of the concept of absolute truth, the fast growing relativistic approach towards ethical problems and the nihilistic attitude toward traditional state institutions and families. But does this give place to Euro-scepticism, Euro-pessimism, Euro-nihilism in the minds and the attitudes of today's society?



The spiritual values of the Judeo-Christian tradition are a heritage that has historically proven its value from the centuries before and after Christ. They have their universal character and claim to have the dignity to be accepted as universal social norms. Amongst them are: the sublime view concerning the divine origin and destination of humans, the ecology of the spirit as well as the principle of justice in combination with the great gifts of freedom and mutual respect (or love). The right of religious freedom is another principle that can be derived from the biblical story. This means that each and every person and community has the right of free expression of faith (in terms of religious pluralism) through teaching. The European house of the future is being built in our multicultural and pluralistic Europe. This pluralism involves many things with religion being among the most important. Building will involve the mutual efforts of different people confessing different religions and cultural traditions. This brings up the question of a tolerant relationship among all religions.

With the entrance of Bulgaria into the EU our society needs information about the interaction between the EU's legal system and the national organisation of religious matters, and more specifically, the positions of European and national laws on issues concerning religious communities in the EU member states. International legislation concerning human rights is already being applied in Bulgaria. Most of the international legal acts and international conventions that were ratified by our country are now in action.

This paper outlines the legislative regulation of the right of confession in national and international legislation. It reveals the nature and main characteristics of freedom of thought, conscience, religion and their legal regulation in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria. Bulgarian legislation is compared with the relevant international legislation

## **Historical development of human rights and freedoms**

Bulgaria, among other former communist-bloc countries, is one in which atheistic propaganda had a devastating effect. Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant believers were persecuted and their ministry was restricted. Most spiritual leaders gave up their pastoral role in the church and focused mainly on ritual, as far as they were permitted. Very often they were agents of the communist government.

Religious freedom was violated in every possible way. During the communist regime there was no such thing as free expression of faith, and

religion was considered the 'opium of the people'. Believers were persecuted because of their faith in God. Unfortunately, the residue of this way of thinking is still evident in contemporary Bulgarian society.

After the communist regime fell in 1989 there was a change in our society. The transition towards long desired freedom and democracy was not a smooth and easy process. The laws were totally changed, but that was not enough. It took time to change people's way of thinking, and to change their presumptions. In this time there was the need for reassessing the life of every individual in society. People were no longer just part of one social-political system. This was a basic and determining value. Humans have dignity and freedom, which we need to assert. There is no society that can advance without education and the initiative of its individual members. In the past people used to think that they could not start anything without the permission and agreement of the state and social organisations. Now they have to realise that they are not only the main goal of societal progress, but they are the agents for public progress. People can be active in a legal system only if we exercise our rights.

According to the Christian teaching of the church which is based on the gospel and revealed in creation, and the teachings of the Church Fathers from East and West, we are godlike and free persons with our own dignity, which assumes respect of basic human rights and the consequent public interests. Christian teaching does not allow oppression or for the individual's self-determination to be dictated by individual utilitarianism and theories of liberalism. It also does not accept the restraint of personal freedom in the frame of an ideology group or Utopian political systems.<sup>1</sup>

The main law regulating religious rights and freedom is the Denominations Law of 1949. This law was still active when the new constitution in 1991 was voted on and put in place in spite of the fact that many of its articles were declared by the constitutional court as being unconstitutional. Having these two contradictory things, the old law and the new constitution, both considered to be the law of the land, constituted a legal gap that continued till 2002 when the new Denominations Act was accepted. It was criticised on many issues. One of them was that according to this law the Bulgarian Orthodox Church received a legal status (specifically, one of the synods). The constitutionality of several articles (Art. 7, 8, 10 and others) were disputed immediately, as was their correspondence with the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom. Even today this issue is still one of the leading

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<sup>1</sup> K. Nushev, *The Christian Teaching of Justice: Theological Ethical Research* (Sofia: Veren, Sofia, 2008), p. 299.

topics in our churches and society, after the decision of the European court for human rights in Strasbourg, which stated that Bulgaria has violated freedom of religious expression and that the state has acted inappropriately in the decisions of the church.<sup>2</sup>

The preambles of most international documents for human rights point out the mutual inheritance of values, traditions, ideals, which unite countries and allow them to defend human rights. In the European Convention it is stressed that the governments of the European countries that have the same views and have a common heritage of political traditions and ideals in recognising the freedom and the superiority of legal rights, are determined to make the first steps to fulfil a number of rights written in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In Bulgaria during the communist regime democratic, legal, political traditions and ideals did not exist. The superiority of the law and freedom were violated. After the collapse of the socialist system these ideals were formulated and affirmed in the Bulgarian Constitution of 1991, but they failed to influence the public mind and culture and to become national ideas. Legal principles recognised by European civilisation for certain historical and political reasons are still not working in Bulgaria. Our country has been growing in its own way neglecting these ideas and values that helped other European countries on the legal path of development. The main task was for democratic legal ideas and values to become milestones for the advancement of the state. The laws created in the conditions of liberal democracy have to find their real application in the Bulgarian context.

What part does Bulgaria have in the common European heritage and space? Do we share common values and traditions? If this heritage is defined in terms of liberal democratic emphases on individual liberties or rights, I think that the answer would be rather negative, because although Bulgaria is in the Balkans our nation still holds to a distinctly Eastern collectivist mentality. This is one of the reasons for a possible clash between our ethnic identity and observations in applying this European legislation. In every member country of the European Union the cultures, religions (confessions), traditions and customs are different. It takes time to understand and stand up and defend human rights and freedoms. The process of establishment is a difficult one, because there are elements of European culture which have been transferred into a social environment

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<sup>2</sup> European Court of Human Rights, the Orthodox Church (Metropolitan Inokentiy) and others in Bulgaria, (applications nos. 412/03 and 35677/04), Strasbourg, 22 January 2009, also see: [http://www.dnevnik.bg/evropa/2009/01/22/619911\\_sudut\\_v\\_strasburg\\_dade\\_tri\\_meseca\\_na\\_durjavata\\_i/](http://www.dnevnik.bg/evropa/2009/01/22/619911_sudut_v_strasburg_dade_tri_meseca_na_durjavata_i/), last access on April 06 2010.

that is not prepared for them. Bulgaria and the other communist countries have developed in a different legal and moral standard, very different from the European cultural tradition. This is one of the arguments that the Russian academic N. N. Moiseev has in his objections to the theory of universality of human rights, which states that these rights are equally applicable for every population in the world. The process of giving, taking and adapting to the universal standards of human rights depends not only on the social-culture systems, but also on the economic well-being of the people living in the counties. The difference between cultures serves as a factor which can destabilise society and deform the personality of individuals. The old behavioural norms lose their significance, and the new ones are still not adopted and as a result society loses its capability for self-organisation. This loss decreases the social-normative complex as the foundation for normal existence within the state.

## **Legislative order of the confessions (denominations) in Bulgaria**

Faced with the challenges of society as they still trying to find their place in it, different religions are faced with their own specific problems. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church needs to deal with the schism that has lasted more then ten years and with the issues of Orthodox legitimacy. At the time of crisis the governing party of the National Movement in support of King Simeon II (NSDV) tried to solve the problem of legitimacy among the rival claimants first with the law of religion in the beginning in 2002 and later with the actions of the court and the police (2004). Many law-experts consider these steps of the government as interference of the state in the Church, violation of religious freedom and the lost of confidence in the authority of the Orthodox Church.<sup>3</sup>

According to the 1991 Constitution, the traditional religion in Bulgaria is Eastern Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is a cultural, historical and social phenomenon which forms a collective, corporative ethnic identity. It is understood as a traditional religion because in the Bulgarian culture Orthodoxy is a key factor for forming the individual.

There is a need for a new way to ease the tension created by the differences between our cultures and the exercise of the Western European laws which are part of our legal system but were created in a different

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<sup>3</sup> N. Bogomilova, *Religia, pravo i politika na Balkanite v kraja na 20 i nachaloto to 21 vek* [Religion, law and politics on the Balkans at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century] (Sofia: "Iztok-Zapad," 2005).

context of liberal democracy where people and their individual rights are highly exalted.

The European Union exists based on economic relationships between its members, but its politics are expanding and are reaching more and more legal areas. The relationships between the state and the churches in the countries of the EU are being arranged within a frame with a different approach for each national constitution and legislation. When we look at Europe today we start from the 'state church' in England, Denmark and Sweden and then come to France where the state excludes denominations. Between these extremes we find legal systems that arrange cooperation between two institutions which are provided with special contract mechanisms (for example Germany and Greece) The traditions of the individual countries in Europe in reference to the rights of religious communities are the direct result of historical, religious and demographic circumstances. They are in close connection with the phenomenon of 'national identity'. The states' individual legislative systems also reflect national self-governance and identity. The differences in the legal systems are so great that trying to mould them would be unthinkable. At the same time European integration presupposes gradual synchronisation of national and European law. We are faced with the challenge of seeing how well this mechanism works in Bulgaria.<sup>4</sup>

The situation of the minority religious groups in Bulgaria is interesting. After receiving the constitution in 1991 there was a movement against any other religious groups, which often were portrayed as cults. The public awareness of the legal framework is still insufficient. Public opinion is often manipulated by the media. The religious groups in Bulgaria that are subject to false accusations and attacks need to know their rights and to stand up for their freedom.

One of the problems of the 'other' confessions is that they allow themselves to be labelled and accused of being cults. Being a minority it seems that they are in fear, shame, and often they apologise for their differences regarding their way of expression. This problem is reinforced by the fact that many people do not have a clear view of their rights and religious freedoms according to the existing legal order. For example, I will quote Article 18 from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:

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<sup>4</sup> H. Berov, "Religion and laws in the European Union," in *Bogoslovska Misal [Theological Thought, in Bulgarian]*, Volumes 1-4, 2007, p. 72.

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of their choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair their freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of their choice.<sup>5</sup>

This international pact was ratified by the Bulgarian National Assembly in 1976. But the patriarchal concept of the patron-state which gives or grants rights to its citizens did not, in fact, guarantee the actual rights and was unreliable in regard to the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens. Even after its ratification, the arbitrariness, repression and limitations of personal and political rights of humans in Bulgaria continued. The treaty only had any value after 1989, thirteen years later. The believer can value the freedom of others and protect their rights only if they are familiar with those rights. Otherwise, they are just values written on paper without real life applications.

Knowing, keeping and defending rights aims at developing critical skills in people and making their sense of justice stronger. It should awaken and strengthen their readiness to defend human rights and religious freedom and to stand up against their violation. Part of this is also their willingness to defend not just their rights but those of other people as well. From this perspective keeping human rights and religious freedoms is connected naturally with instilling responsibility and tolerance in people of different religions. Quite often we are quick to take advantage of rights given by law, but we readily leave the obligations, responsibilities and limitations prescribed by it to others. It is important to note that everyone is equal before the law, and there are no limitations of rights and privileges based on race, nationality, language, gender, social background, religion, faith, etc. No limitations are accepted. Rights, freedoms and limitations regulated in the legislation are equal for all religious communities and institutions—for Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants as well as those confessing Islam, Judaism, and even for atheists.

Justice as a Christian virtue refers to our personal dignity, defining our moral character. It plays a significant role in relationships between people. Principles of justice give birth to moral demands with respect to the rights, dignity, honour, life, and freedom of everyone. Christian ethics ties these issues to the value of humans as free beings and demands respect for the

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<sup>5</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Ratified with edict № 1199 of the National Assembly, active in Bulgaria from 23.03.1976 r., GG 43/28.05.1976

human dignity of every man or woman. That is, to treat everyone as a free person and to respect their dignity as godlike beings with inviolable natural rights. To be just means to treat our loved ones properly by not violating their dignity and personal rights and by caring for their well-being. From a legal and moral point of view there is inseparable unity between the rights and obligations of every legal entity. Others' rights are our obligation which comes from our moral duty and personal responsibility. Respecting personal dignity and natural human rights is not just a matter of mercy and morality but is first and foremost justice and the rule of law. If respect for personal rights is not present, then chaos and lawlessness will come which lead to crime and injustice. Giving due respect to human rights is the first condition to keep the requirement of justice and guarantees. No one should be deprived of the rights to which he/she is entitled. Mercy is an expression of compassion towards the need of others but respect towards their natural rights is in accordance with the requirements of justice.<sup>6</sup>

Another important international act is the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom. Article 9 reads:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change one's religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.<sup>7</sup>

This convention is the foundation of the European legislation and it is strictly observed in the common European legislation plan. The EU has a system of control on the implementation of the state's obligations. In other words the member states are required to acknowledge the rule of law and the right of every person under their jurisdiction for protection when their human rights and fundamental freedoms are violated. The convention contains working mechanisms for the protection of basic rights, including the freedom of religion. On the one hand, the EU respects the legal tradition of the member states in regards to organisation of religion and its

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<sup>6</sup> K. Nushev, *The Christian Teaching of Justice*, p.305.

<sup>7</sup> "European Convention on Human Rights," in H. Berov, *State and Confessions of Faith: Legal Codification on Religion and Religious Communities in Bulgaria* (Sofia: Ciela Soft and Publishing AD, 2009), p. 26.

respect of the status of religious communities; on the other it obliges them to observe the requirements for free self-government and self-determination of religious communities and institutions. By ratifying the European convention the countries are obliged to provide for the individual and collective freedom of religious groups. Without its adoption in national law it is impossible to build up democratic conditions in the member-states.<sup>8</sup>

Religious freedom is individual because the individual decides whether or not to join a certain religion, to accept or reject its beliefs. However, it is also collective in the sense that without being limited to faith or denomination it requires that free exercise has to be guaranteed. Religious groups have the right to worship, practice observance and administration of the group's life. This inevitably raises the question of their relationship with the state. According to our Constitution, the different religious groups have freedom and religious institutions are separated from the state.

The fact that the Republic of Bulgaria guarantees freedom of religion in fact means that not only the government is obliged to value this freedom, but also that it is engaged to prevent any violations of these freedoms on even an individual level. The secular character of the government should guarantee the protection of the freedom and the rights of every citizen.

The contemporary understanding of the church for the responsibility of the state in society is in direct connection with the political functions and the role of the state in establishing, sustaining and protecting a just public order and its different dimensions—political, legal, social, and economic. The political history of the relationships between church and state in the twentieth century shows that only in the conditions of a legal state, based on the superiority of the latter and the principles of a divided political and religious sphere does an atmosphere exist that will not lead to violations of the freedom of the individual and religion. In a totalitarian state this separation of the church from the state leads to oppression and the taking away of freedom from individuals, coercion concerning the believer's conscience, and discrimination of religious communities in the state.

The Constitution regulates the principle of separation and autonomy of religious institutions, and also the inadmissibility of state interference and administration in the life of the organisation. Religious institutions separated from the state are equal. The fact that Eastern Orthodoxy is given a legal status in Article 13, Point 3 in the Constitution is no reason for it to

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<sup>8</sup> H. Berov, "Religion and laws in the European Union," p. 81.



receive special privileges or advantages. The use of the term 'religious' in that article is questionable, because Christianity, Islam, Judaism and so on are identified as religions but Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism are confessions within Christianity. The Law of Religions determines Eastern Orthodoxy as the traditional confession.

Regarding the issue of the meaning of the term 'traditional' the Constitutional Court ruled on February 1998 that:

... the tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church confession expresses its cultural-historical role and its significance for the Bulgarian nation as well as its contemporary meaning for the state which is most vividly expressed in the system of official celebrations (all Sundays, New Year, Christ's Resurrection, and the Birth of Christ).<sup>9</sup>

It is true that the broad propagation of one system of beliefs gives the people a sense of identity, security and affiliation. The citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria who confess other kinds of religious convictions and exercise their right to different kinds of confessions can find themselves in a state of isolation in spite of the fact that they share the historic values of the influence of Eastern Orthodoxy for the people and in the state. When only one, even if the most popular, confession is characterised as 'traditional' it is a premise for breaking the universal framework that is required to guarantee the protection and the observance of religious freedom in one democratic society in order to prevent conditions for confrontation. Regardless of denominational affiliation, one ought to consider also the fact that mere attending of a certain type of worship or public profession of faith can be a sign of conformity to majority expectations rather than a genuine expression of faith or freedom of conscience.

A 1992 Constitutional Court ruled that freedom of conscience is an area which at its core does not allow for legal sanction.<sup>10</sup> The joining of a person to one or any confession is a matter of deep personal conviction on which the state, even if it desires, could not exercise material influence.

This is the understanding of legislators according to which confessions are free and do not depend upon the state (Art. 13, Points 1 and 2 from the Constitution ); freedom of conscience, freedom of thought

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<sup>9</sup> 'Decision no. 2 of 18 February 1998 on Constitutional Court no. 15 from 1997', *Government Gazette* № 22, 24.02(1998).

<sup>10</sup> 'Decision no. 5 on Constitutional Court no 11 from 1992', *Government Gazette* № 49 from 16.06.(1992).

and the choice of religion or of religious or atheistic views shall be inviolable. The state shall assist in the maintenance of tolerance and respect between the adherents of different denominations, and between believers and non-believers (Art. 37, Point 1 from the Constitution).

Reflection on the texts quoted above shows without a doubt that the right of confession as well as the right of thoughts and convictions is absolute, fundamental and immediately connected with the inner spiritual peace of a human being, and because of that it is of supreme value. In Christian social education public order is built on the value and dignity of people as free persons and it functions in three basic principles of freedom, justice and solidarity.

Article 37, paragraph 2 of the Constitution states: 'The state cooperates to sustain tolerance and respect between believers from different religions and also between believers and nonbelievers'. The common meaning of the term 'cooperates' does not presuppose concern that is absolutely free from situational traps, religious prejudices, and the influence of geographic factors and established practices of institutions. This concept shows distant 'good' intentions by the state. The idea for cooperation leads to a group of values such as help, support and collaboration. The legislative order has to specify exactly when, how, and to what extent the state can cooperate. Among other abstract notions in the Constitution there exists the unique characteristic of the idea of 'cooperation'. This 'cooperation' does not imply state engagement but most of all conveys the idea that from time to time the government could place its citizens under state control in the name of the well-being of others in the field of tolerance. It also reminds us that government interference could be misused. Such interference can be for reasons such as personal revenge and for repartition of properties as was witnessed during the events in June 2004 which lead to the occupation of 220 Orthodox churches, the closing of some others, the persecution of believers, and ill-treatment of priests. Obviously in this case it could be said that 'cooperation' was used as an excuse for the arbitrariness of the government. Instead of cooperation the result was a violation of human rights and freedoms.

## **The Christian view of personal freedom and human dignity**

The rights of confession and religious freedom are important because without them humans cannot develop and confirm our personhood and dignity.

According to the biblical teaching of creation, humans were created according to the image of God and in his likeness. (Gen 1:26-27) We are persons called by God, who is also a Person. In this mutual relationship God confers freedom on us because it is a necessary condition for reaching perfect God-likeness (through grace). If we are persons and free, we can accept God's will, but we can also reject it.<sup>11</sup> The Church Fathers and teachers such as Thomas Aquinas, Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Saint Ambrose of Milan, Augustine and other Christian theologians have taught that the Image of God in humans is within our spirit, our free will, and our personal responsibility for our own actions.<sup>12</sup> Every one of us has irrevocable dignity. God's image is revealed in us in our free self-identification in connection with God. God has created us with a free will. He creates his own free co-workers, not slaves. Freedom is the choice, the way which leads toward salvation or damnation. It is a basic characteristic of human existence connected with the realisation of the essence and purpose of life.<sup>13</sup>

Humans are unique God-like creatures who are free and capable of knowing spiritual values. We are able to self-identify according to them and to make a conscious choice. We are the carriers of a free spirit and capable of self-identification. Freedom is the quality that brings a human closer to God in the highest degree and reveals our God-likeness and the high personal dignity of a reasonable moral creature. From the point of view of Christian ethics to be free means to have a degree of dignity and natural right of choice given by God, characteristics that even God does not take away. We are gifted from God with freedom to determine our own status according to the will of God and to fulfil or to reject voluntarily the moral requirements of God's law. This freedom makes us reasonable moral creatures and also gives us duties and responsibilities to carry the consequences of our choices.<sup>14</sup>

God creates us free, gives us the choice to whom or in what to believe or not to believe. According to our Constitution, 'Freedom of conscience, freedom of thought and the choice of religion and of religious or atheist views shall be inviolable' (Art. 37, Par. 1). The legal norm reveals freedom of choice in two aspects: that which is preferred as a confession and the act of choosing itself through which a human decides to receive certain religious or atheist views. Legislators recognise the right of choice of religious or atheist views. In the preamble of the Constitution the supreme

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<sup>11</sup> E. Naidenov, "Created in God's image," in *Bulgarian Theology*, No.1 (1999): 101.

<sup>12</sup> D. Kirov, *The Dimensions of the Person* (Sofia: Sofia – S.A., 2005), p. 80.

<sup>13</sup> I. Merjanova, *Eschatological Anthropology: The Person in History and in Contemporary Orthodoxy* (Veliko Tarnovo: Praksis, 2000), p. 93.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *On grace and free will* (Sofia: ET-Sofia, 1992).

origin of freedom, humanism, equality, tolerance and recognition of human dignity is pronounced.

In accordance with these it is affirmed that the right of confession is not without limitations from the perspective of its real expression. When we express our freedom we should not forget that there are always limitations not to damage and not to abuse the freedom, rights and interests of others. Religious freedom is reasonable and useful when it is regulated by legal norms, situated in a certain legal framework and has moral limitations. Article 37, point 2 from the Constitution states that the expression of freedom of conscience and of confession cannot be against national security, public order, people's health and morals, or against the rights and the freedoms of other citizens. In Article 13, point 4 it is prohibited to exploit religious communities, institutions and faith convictions for political purposes. These limitations are listed in detail and cannot be subtracted or expanded. Otherwise, the point of the articles mentioned confirms the particularity of the public value of the right of choice within the system of the basic rights of citizens and guarantees that they are not exercised against the rights and the interests of others.

Freedom of conscience is the freedom to believe or not to believe in God. This in some sense presupposes the choice of a confession, but the practice of the right of conscience is not necessary. This freedom has as a result a choice of one or another religion but the right of conscience can also be expressed in fully atheist convictions. Freedom of thought is a general form of freedom. It is an inner state of the human spirit and because of its nature cannot be limited. Freedom of confession affects the right of believers to organise themselves in religious communities and institutions to follow the requirements of their faith and rituals.

The development of the international order for human rights strengthens the understanding of the triad 'thought, conscience, religion' and covers all possible relationships of the individual towards the world and society and leaves each of us to define our destiny. Thus, freedom of thought, conscience, and religion are the basic rights which we have to defend and uphold.

The right of confession as a basic, absolute, personal right is irrevocable. According to Article 57, point 3 of the Constitution, freedom of conscience, freedom of thought and the choice of confession cannot be temporarily limited even in a state of war, military or other state of emergency. They are placed equal to the right of life, prohibition against torture, of cruel inhuman or devastating attitudes, forced assimilation, inviolability of personal life and with the right for a fair trial.

Bulgarian legislation uses mostly the term ‘confession’ and not ‘religion’, as it is in the international articles. According to Article 1 from the additional decree of the Denomination Act from 2002, a ‘confession’ is an accumulation of faith convictions and principles, religious community and its religious institution. The right of confession includes the individual right of faith and religion, choice and change of religious beliefs and the right to express or profess faith or religion. It is a general right which includes freedom of thought, conscience, religious beliefs and rituals.<sup>15</sup>

The right of confession is affirmed by the highest legal act, the Constitution, the supreme law in the Republic of Bulgaria, but this by itself is no guarantee for its realisation. A legal order is not just a sum of rules and norms; it is necessary for them to become an active principle. Legislative, judiciary and executive authorities need to execute their constitutionally given power and obligations. The legislative authorities together with the executive and the judicial authorities play an important role in the application and observation of religious freedom.

From 1 January 2007 a new period began for the European Union as well as for its two new members, Bulgaria and Romania. Seventeen years after the beginning of the democratic changes in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, Bulgaria has the chance to take an active part in European life. Of course, after taking the great responsibility to be a member of the EU Bulgaria must continue to build its civil society according to the democratic norms in modern European countries. In every area of the public life of the countries that are members it is necessary to observe human rights and freedoms. In this legal framework great importance has been given to the law of religions and the way it is applied. Religious life is full not only in the life of one individual or community, but also in religious communities and institutions.

As part of the European Union, Bulgaria needs to inform our society about the correspondence between the legal system of the European Union and the national law of religious affairs, and, more specifically, about the relationship of the European legal system with the Bulgarian legal system on the matter of religious communities in the member countries of the European Union.

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<sup>15</sup> K. Nishev, and D. Nikolchev, ‘Svobodata na veroizpovedaniata i Bulgarskata Pravoslana Tsarkva – predizvikatelstva i perspektivi v konteksta na evrointegratsijata’ [The Freedom of religion and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church: Challenges and perspectives in the context of European integration], in *Prisaedinjavaeto na Bulgaria kam Evropejskija Sajuz – predizvikatelstva, problemi, perspektivi* [Accession of Bulgaria to the European Union: Challenges, problems and perspectives], collection of essays, volume III (Burgas: BSU [Bourgas Free University], 2007), p. 145.

International legislation on human rights plays a role in Bulgaria as well. Most of the international legal statements that were accepted in our country are now applicable. The different governments thus are obligated to comply with international standards. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that with the legal regulation of human rights and freedoms all the social problems of every person will be solved. This is just the premise of this new existence, and its full development has just begun.

For almost twenty years after the fall of communism, a growing awareness among people toward the rule of law and improvement in observation of the law can be seen. But even today not all agreements have been kept. In their reports, the international institutions criticise our country for failing to deal with corruption, failing to protect citizens' rights from legal and administrative bodies, freedom of religion and integration of minority groups.

Violation of human rights and religious freedoms, lack of responsibility and impunity of members of the government create an environment in which everything is allowed and alienates the citizens from the state. These are serious challenges with which our society will have to cope to make possible the existence of a true democracy, a law-abiding state and personal freedom, promoted by the Constitution of the country.

Our society has to be well informed about its rights and the possibility of protecting oneself when one's rights are violated. Knowing and observing human rights and religious freedoms is naturally connected with an upbringing in social responsibility and tolerance, and education against racism and hostility. The education about human rights has to be connected with the task of learning how to tolerate others in their differences.

Religious freedom can be a bridge between cultures, a way of communicating between them, a way to sustain peace. Knowing and tolerating different faiths is an opportunity for coexistence of different cultures in the same location, which is a real fact today. The right to choose your own faith brings an irrefutable social benefit for everyone and according to the criteria of secularism brings mutual understanding between believers and nonbelievers. All this transforms religious freedom into a phenomenon with fundamental meaning for the life of today's society, and the right of religious freedom—a fundamental right for every democratic legal system.

**Kameliya Slavcheva, Sofia, Bulgaria**

## 9

# **Ivan Kargel and the Emergence of Baptists in the Bulgarian Orthodox Context**

Gregory Nichols

The Bulgarian nation adopted Orthodox Christianity in 864, becoming one of the first peoples in Eastern Europe to do so. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church was instrumental in the amalgamation of the peoples of Bulgaria and aided in the development of a national identity for the Bulgarians. Early in the twelfth century, the Ottoman Turks began to conquer the Byzantine Empire and the Bulgarian lands fell unchallenged into their hands. Thousands of Turks poured into Bulgaria bringing with them a new government, culture and the Muslim religion. Bulgarians who converted to Islam were dealt with fairly and treated kindly. Those that remained true to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church were dealt with harshly. As the Turkish state weakened in the eighteenth century, Bulgarians were given freedoms. During this period schools using the Bulgarian language were opened, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church experienced a revival and there was a renewed effort to publish Bulgarian materials. These freedoms whetted the appetite of the Bulgarian people and a rebellion against the Turkish rulers occurred in April of 1876. This rebellion was harshly suppressed and over 100 villages and five monasteries were destroyed. It is estimated that over 30,000 Bulgarians lost their lives in this uprising. The scenes of slaughter shocked the world. Russia, anxious to expand its sphere of influence went to war with the Turks to liberate Bulgaria. During the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878) Russian troops enlisted the support of Bulgarian patriots and together liberated Bulgaria, forging a deep and lasting bond between the two peoples.

## **Early Free Church activity in Bulgaria**

Bulgaria has been a difficult field for a Protestant expression of Christianity due to Muslim influence, a strong connection between national identity and membership in the state church and political instability. These factors have created a difficult and rocky soil for foreign missionaries. The first Protestant missionaries to Bulgaria were Methodists and Congregationalists. These two were followed 25 years later by the Baptists. The Methodists and Congregationalists arrived in the country at a time

when it was firmly within the Ottoman Empire, and neither practised believer's baptism.

The Free Church movement in Bulgaria started in 1857. Methodists and Congregationalists,<sup>1</sup> in a display of Christian unity, shared the work. The Balkan Mountains which divide the country were generally used as the boundary with the Methodists ministering to the west and north of the mountains while the Congregationalists laboured in Rumelia on the south and east. The first recorded non-Orthodox congregation in Bulgaria was established in 1870 in the southern town of Bansko.<sup>2</sup> Methodists started in the north with a preaching station in Shumen.<sup>3</sup> In the south, Congregationalists branched out from the Bansko community to Adrianople and added three preaching stations.<sup>4</sup> The exclusive relationship seemed to work until 1866 when Baptist colporteurs began to work in the country.<sup>5</sup>

Albert Wardin points to the political chaos which surrounded much of those early years of missionary endeavours when he writes that American Methodist missionaries, working in the area north of the Balkan Mountains, were forced to give up their work in 1871 and allowed to return in 1873 only to leave again in 1877 because of rebellions and the ensuing Russo-Turkish War. After the Russo-Turkish War, a third attempt was made but after 30 years of ministry, this mission could report only 65 full members.<sup>6</sup> During these years, the American Bible Society worked primarily in the south while the British and Foreign Bible Society carried on missionary endeavours in the north. These societies were active in the printing and distribution of Christian literature and Bibles. The British and Foreign Bible society did not allow their workers to start churches but they did allow them to persuasively witness to interested customers.<sup>7</sup> In 1875 the Bulgarian Evangelical Society was formed.

The first Baptist church of Bulgaria is linked to the Congregational mission work in Kazanluk.<sup>8</sup> Within that Congregational church, several

<sup>1</sup> The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was predominately Congregational in membership.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Benjamin Mojzes, 'A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia,' (PhD thesis, Boston University Graduate School, 1965), pp. 92-93.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 202

<sup>4</sup> Albert W. Wardin, 'The Baptists In Bulgaria,' *The Baptist Quarterly* 34, 4 (October 1991): 148

<sup>5</sup> Theo Angelov, 'The Baptist Movement in Bulgaria,' *Journal of European Baptist Studies* (Prague, Czech Republic) 1, 3 (May 2001), p.8.

<sup>6</sup> Wardin, 'The Baptists in Bulgaria', p 148.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.protestantstvo.com/pdf/BaptMovement.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Kazanluk is the spelling I am using for the town which is also spelled Kasanlik, Kasanik, Kasanlyk, Kasanluk and Kazanlyk. I am also using the name Rustchuk which is the Turkish name for the Bulgarian town of Ruse. Kazanluk is located south of the Balkan Mountains which divide Bulgaria laterally and north of the Sredia Mountains in a valley know for growing roses.



members came to an understanding that baptism was intended for adults. The ideas began when Stephen Kurdov, a Bulgarian from Tsarigrad, heard of the Baptist ideas from Armenian refugees who had migrated within the Turkish Empire to Bulgaria in search of work. Kurdov accepted the Baptist understanding and became a colporteur for the American Bible Society. His materials found their way into the Congregational Church in Kazanluk. A pseudo-Baptist group began to grow within the Congregational Church. In 1874 they decided to find someone who would baptise them. Rev. Bond, the Congregational missionary working in Kazanluk, tried to explain that this was not a necessary action but several from his Kazanluk congregations decided to head north and cross the mountains in search of the German Baptists. They did not find the Baptists but they found a bookseller who told them about the theology of the Baptists and gave them the address of the German Baptists. Soon the Kazanluk group was writing letters, appealing to the Baptists of Turkey and Germany, asking for help. The appeals went unanswered for several years. In 1879, August Liebig [Libich], president of the Russian-Romanian Baptist Association, shared the news and request from Kazanluk with the entire German Baptist conference in Hamburg.<sup>9</sup> Johann Kargel, at that time the newly married pastor of the German Baptist congregation of St. Petersburg, was in Hamburg for the conference. There seem to be three factors which motivated Kargel to travel to Bulgaria to meet the need: he heard of the need in the German Baptist Union Conference; he had already prayed about the general needs of Bulgaria with Colonel Vasiliy Pashkov and his aristocratic circle of evangelical friends before he heard about the desire for baptism<sup>10</sup>; and his health was not good in the cold and wet St. Petersburg climate.<sup>11</sup>

Kargel's decision to travel to Bulgaria was unknown to the Kazanluk group and in 1880 Grigor B. Duminkoff wrote another letter to the German Baptist Union. The letter was published in German and English in an article entitled, 'The Macedonian Cry Re-Echoed from Macedonia Itself'.<sup>12</sup> In Duminkoff's letter, he stated that, 'the Bulgarian church at Kazanluk has accepted the Evangelical doctrine for four years past inasmuch as they have acknowledged and accepted the baptism of believers according to the teaching of the word of God. They have therefore rejected infant baptism

<sup>9</sup> Angelov, 'The Baptist Movement in Bulgaria', p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> See Johann G. Kargel, *Zwischen Den Enden Der Erde Unter Bruedern In Ketten* (Weinigerode am Harz: Licht im Osten, 1928)

<sup>11</sup> 'St. Petersburg', *Quarterly Reporter of the German Baptist Mission*, 87 (January 1880): 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Der Wahrheitsszeuge*, 15 Sept, 1880, pp142-143; *Quarterly Reporter of the German Baptist Mission*, Oct. 1880, pp, 1-2. .

because it can nowhere be proven from the New Testament'.<sup>13</sup> The letter is signed with 22 names of people who were willing to fight for the doctrine. The article was reprinted in English in October 1880 and gained wide circulation throughout Baptists in America.<sup>14</sup> Kargel arrived in Kazanluk in September 1880 and had already performed the baptisms when the article was printed in the United States.

## The Macedonian call

Kargel arrived in Rustchuk on 4 September 1880. His detailed account of the trip was printed in serial form in German in *Der Wahrheitszeuge*<sup>15</sup> and an abbreviated version was published in English in the *Quarterly Reporter of the German Baptist Mission*.<sup>16</sup> Kargel was not sure how he would travel to Kazanluk nor did he know the Bulgarian language. As he stepped off the boat in Rustchuk, he was met by a Martin Heringer of the British and Foreign Bible Society, who volunteered to be Kargel's guide and interpreter.

They arrived in Kazanluk on Friday 5 September and were greeted by Brother Duminkoff. The next day Kargel, through Heringer's interpretation, began to interview the Bulgarians who wanted to be baptised. Kargel started with the statement from Acts 10:29, 'So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me' to begin the interviews. Over the course of Saturday and Sunday, eight people sought baptism and six were approved. Of the six that were approved, one was dissuaded by the Congregational missionary, Mr. Bond, against baptism. Mr Lewis Bond had been in Bulgaria since 1871 and was part of the missionary team in the first indigenous church plant by the Congregationalists.<sup>17</sup> He did not open his pulpit to Kargel and held heated discussions with both Heringer and Kargel over the issue of baptism. Kargel records that it was a difficult conversation. 'I put myself in his [Bond's] position and felt that if I had won souls for the Lord and others had come to avert them [steer them away] from me, there would be a great unending pain. On the other hand, I also saw clear in the law of the Lord that tells me that no one should resist the water, that those who have received the Holy Spirit, just the same as we, should be baptised'.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> 'The Macedonian Cry Re-Echoed from Macedonia Itself,' *Quarterly Reporter of the German Baptist Mission* (Hamburg, Germany), Oct. 1880, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> 'Eine Reise Nach Kasanlik, 1,' *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, May 15 (1881) and 'Eine Reise Nach Kasanlik, 2,' *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, June 1 (1881)

<sup>16</sup> 'Bulgaria,' *Quarterly Reporter Of The German Baptist Mission* (Hamburg, Germany), April (1881)

<sup>17</sup> Mojzes, 'A History Of The Congregational And Methodist Churches In Bulgaria' thesis/dissertation (1965) p. 94

<sup>18</sup> 'Eine Reise Nach Kasanlik, 1,' *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, May 15 (1881)

Sunday 7 September 1880 is recorded as the beginning of the Baptist Church in Kazanluk, Bulgaria which is considered to be the first Baptist Church in Bulgaria. Johann Kargel baptised five Bulgarians under a full moon in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> Their names were Toshka Pateva, Marijka Belcheva, Nikola Patev, Grigor Drumnikov and Petko Kurkelanov.<sup>20</sup> These Bulgarians had waited 6 years for someone to come a baptise them.

It was this baptism that seems to have confirmed to Kargel that he should leave his pastorate in St. Petersburg and bring his wife to Bulgaria. Kargel and his wife stayed in Rustchuk, Bulgaria until March 1884. Over the course of the first year, Rustchuk became the mother church and Kazanluk became the preaching station primarily because life was a bit easier on the west side of the Balkans for foreigners and it offered a multi-national population which was less tied to the state church and therefore more open to Baptist ideas. It has been noted that the Kazanluk congregation resented this status, understanding themselves to be the first congregation of truly baptised Bulgarians independent of the Ruse Congregation.<sup>21</sup>

## The Kargels in Bulgaria

The Kargels moved to Bulgaria at the request of the Bulgarians in Kazanluk but chose to reside in Rustchuk where they were welcomed in the early months of their stay. Their Turkish and Bulgarian neighbours were seeking out the Kargels to befriend them.<sup>22</sup> Mrs. Kargel tells of stopping in various homes as she made new friends in town.<sup>23</sup> But, within a year, the attitude of the town seemed to turn cold and hostile as the non-Orthodox Christian message penetrated the Orthodox community.<sup>24</sup> Anna Kargel writes, 'When we arrived here, I wrote to you that we were accepted very warmly, but when they knew that my husband came for God's work, they began to look at us differently. Bulgarians considered us no better than dogs, to preach in a home was not possible...Protestants, as we're called here, are not allowed in their homes.'<sup>25</sup> The resistance to their presence strengthened over time. In November, 1882 their housekeeper left them, afraid that she would be beaten by others in the town for working for the Protestants. The rumour circulated on the street that the Kargels kept a

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Angelov, 'The Baptist Movement in Bulgaria' p.10.

<sup>21</sup> Wardin, 'The Baptists in Bulgaria' p. 149.

<sup>22</sup> Anna Kargel to Alexandra Pashkov, December 1, 1880, 2/13/002, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>23</sup> Anna Kargel to Vasilii Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], December 25, 1880, 2/13/004, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>24</sup> The ministry style of the Kargels included Bible and tract distribution, church services, home visitations, and humanitarian aid.

<sup>25</sup> Anna Kargel to Vasilii Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], November 22, 1881, 2/ 13/005, Pashkov Papers.

special book and when a name was written into it, the person could never escape their power. Some locals were even afraid to pass by the gate of the Kargel home.<sup>26</sup> The only helper that the Kargels could find was a converted bandit who was very reluctant to take a bath. Anna Kargel wished for another, if one could be found, and stated in a letter dated September 1882, that they were now considered by the Bulgarians 'almost as pagan' for their Free Church views.

Two months later, in November of 1882, several of the church members were beaten and taken to court where they spent 12 days in jail. Stones were thrown through the windows of the Kargel house and a public baptism was broken up by hooligans. The story of the baptism is told in detail in a letter from Anna Kargel to Vasiliy Pashkov as she recounts the trouble that was stirred up as a result of the baptism. It was eventually moved to a private piece of land but even there the police disrupted the service and arrested the owner of the property. In the end, Johann Kargel, after searching for the chief of police, found him in a card game. He managed to get the property owner released, all the while explaining to those who would listen the meaning of the gospel and baptism.<sup>27</sup>

One of the reasons the Kargels chose Rustchuk was because of the Bible Depot. To the Kargels, literature distribution was a key component in the ministry. The Kargels distributed literature on market days, when the villagers would travel into Rustchuk. They passed out tracts and stopped in neighbours' homes and read Scripture with them. They also distributed books and Bibles to the soldiers in the barracks.<sup>28</sup> In the early stage of this Free Church movement, literature distribution was a foundational principle. The languages involved do seem to be factors as the Kargels requested Pashkov to send literature in Bulgarian, Turkish, and Russian as well as expressing their intention to print tracts locally.

The interdenominational tensions in Rustchuk seemed to be less than those in Kazanluk. The Congregationalist pastor in Kazanluk reacted strongly against Kargel and adult baptism. The Methodists working in northeast Bulgaria were more tolerant of the baptistic work of Kargel. This tolerance may have been due to a common affinity for the Wesleyan message of personal conversion which Kargel likewise shared or to a personal relationship and a common language.<sup>29</sup> Indeed the fact that Kargel

<sup>26</sup> Anna Kargel to Alexandra Pashkov, September 18, 1882, 2/13/012, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Anna Kargel to Vasiliy Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], November 18, 1882, 2/13/013, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>28</sup> Anna Kargel to Vasiliy Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], December 25, 1880, 2/13/004, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>29</sup> The inclusive spirit of the Kargels is shown in their work among the Bulgarians as well as the Turks and Germans who also shared the land. The focus on the Turkish members of the community was driven by Anna who very early mentioned her desire to share the gospel with them and learn their language. She

was the primary leader of the German Baptist congregation in Rustchuk may be the explanation. Whatever the reason, by the end of 1881 Kargel was filling the pulpit of the Methodists in the morning and the German Baptists in the afternoon. It was not an occasional pulpit supply but a steady routine for at least three months.<sup>30</sup>

## Departure from Bulgaria

Johann and Anna Kargel accomplished a tremendous amount of ministry in the 40 months they lived in Bulgaria. In July 1882 he reported the baptism of five Bulgarians and one German with another three Bulgarians being converted. Two months later, he reported that ten more Bulgarians had repented. In May 1883, he wrote that 23 Bulgarians had repented since the start of the New Year. The needs of the area were great and the couple was constantly presented with new opportunities for sharing the Christian message. It was difficult for Johann Kargel to leave Bulgaria, an area which showed so much potential. During the first days in Bulgaria, it was seen by the couple as a location for 'work without end'.<sup>31</sup> Bulgarians as well as Russians and Turks showed an interest in the Christian literature which they provided. In late 1882, when the arrival of their first-born occupied much of Anna's life, her desire to return to St. Petersburg increased and she began to consider leaving Bulgaria. The idea must have been expressed publicly because the Bulgarian congregation expressed their dissatisfaction with the idea and petitioned Pashkov not to remove the Kargels from Bulgaria.<sup>32</sup> Georgy M. Chomenev stated in a letter to Pashkov dated August 1882 that he was converted by Kargel and went on to list towns all over Bulgaria which needed help from men like Kargel. 'I am a Bulgarian' he wrote, 'and it is an insult that you call Kargel back to Russia.'<sup>33</sup> For the time being, the Kargels continued to live in Bulgaria because the ministry in Bulgaria was expanding. One month after Chomenev's letter, the Kargels reported that Bibles were being given to the Bulgarians. Ten Bulgarians had recently repented along with one German

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was keen to learn both Turkish and Bulgarian. She felt that her native Russian tongue gave her an easy ability to learn Bulgarian and desired to speak to the Bulgarians in their heart language. In her opinion, the Bulgarians mistreated the Turks and that elicited a compassion for the Turks from her. The early desire to reach the Turks by Anna Kargel may have also been due to the fact that they, Russians and Turks, were foreigners in Bulgaria, as well as a desire to help the less fortunate. See letter from Anna Kargel to Vasiliy Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], December 25, 1880, 2/13/004, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Anna Kargel to Vasiliy Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], November 22, 1881, 2/13/005, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Anna Kargel to Vasiliy Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], December 25, 1880, 2/13/004, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>32</sup> The Bulgarians' problem was that Anna Kargel was the conduit for all communication to Pashkov and all their words had to be translated by her and then sent to Pashkov. She writes to the Pashkovs of her dilemma, 'All of Rustchuk will write you and I will translate it but I will do it opposite. I'll ask that somehow we be able to be freed from here'. See letter from Anna Kargel to Alexandra Pashkov, September 9, 1882, 2/13/012, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>33</sup> Georgy M. Chomenev to Vasiliy Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], August 2, 1882, 2/13/010, Pashkov Papers.

woman and a Hungarian woman. They had baptised a Jewish man along with his wife and Johann Kargel was preaching in many cities around Bulgaria and everywhere was seeing a response to the Word of the Lord. Describing the times, Anna Kargel writes 'The local Orthodox bishop complained that we were baptising Orthodox believers and the bishop instructed his people to throw stones at us but we are still alive and healthy and two were converted in the event'.<sup>34</sup>

One year later, the Kargels again announced their intention to depart from Bulgaria. It was again not accepted by the Bulgarian congregations. Despite the persecution from the locals, the Baptist congregation was not ready to allow the Kargels to leave. Anna writes, 'When we told the local congregation (that we were returning to Russia) and announced that we were selling our house, a whole storm rose up. They want to keep us here, literally by force, at least for three more years until the preacher returns that was sent to Hamburg to the missionary school'.<sup>35</sup>

However, even in the midst of the storm that was stirred by the Kargels announcement that they would leave Bulgaria, Johann Kargel managed a late winter trip over the mountains to Kazanluk before leaving Bulgaria. In 1884 the Rustchuk congregation had 28 members with presumably fewer members in Kazanluk.<sup>36</sup> This time, Pashkov recalled the Kargels and they departed Bulgaria in March 1884. After his departure from Rustchuk, he co-laboured with Vasilii Pashkov to realise the dream of an Evangelical Alliance in Russia, networking evangelicals across the Russian Empire.<sup>37</sup>

In October 1888,<sup>38</sup> two and a half years after he left Bulgaria, Kargel returned to Rustchuk and was joyously welcomed.<sup>39</sup> On this trip, he

<sup>34</sup> Anna Kargel to Vasilii Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], September 18, 1882, 2/13/011, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>35</sup> Anna Kargel to Vasilii Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], January 16, 1884, 2/13/021, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Wardin, 'The Baptists in Bulgaria' p.149.

<sup>37</sup> Anna gave an insight into her husband's plans in a letter to Pashkov which stated that 'he has felt some kind of need to go to Russia to work in the South or on the Volga, wherever God wills, but not in the Baptist community where there is no peace'. Johann Kargel ministered as an itinerant preacher with trips to the Saratov area and the Volga region. His departure from Bulgaria was not the direct result of a reassignment from Pashkov. It was a change in his home base for his itinerant preaching trips. From the time of the Kargels' departure from Bulgaria until Pashkov's death in 1902, Johann Kargel spent approximately 20% of his time on itinerant preaching trips.

<sup>38</sup> Johann Kargel still maintained contact with the Bulgarian churches that he had helped found. Two trips were planned which never came to fruition. The first in 1885 was blocked due to poor weather. The second trip was planned for 1886 but was thwarted due to a passport issue. Kargel stayed in contact with the Bulgarian Baptists and worked to insure that the young Bulgarian who was in training in Hamburg was soon to return. See letter 2/13/16.

<sup>39</sup> See Johann Kargel to Vasilii Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], October 25, 1888, 2/13/60, Pashkov Papers. 'Oh dear brother, I am thanking the Lord that he brought me home this route as I see how He was able to use me here. I give Him praise, thanks and honour for this. Here in Rustchuk they were already waiting

travelled to Lompalanka and Lom with Vasilii Marchev,<sup>40</sup> the Bulgarian who had returned from his studies in the Baptist school in Hamburg. While on this trip they passed out tracts and New Testaments, preaching at every possible opportunity. It is difficult to tell if this trip by Kargel and Marchev was the incentive for the founding of the Lompalanka church but the Baptist congregation was founded near to the time of their October 1888 visit and the Lompalanka church was considered the daughter of the Rustchuk Baptist Church.<sup>41</sup>

Marchev was vital to the growth of the Baptist church in Bulgaria after the Kargels' departure. After the 1888 trip, Kargel assured Pashkov that Marchev was competent to carry on the work that he had started. Kargel was glad that he had the opportunity to return because there were some teaching errors that had crept into the Bulgarian church. It seems to have been something related to legalism. Here are Kargel's words.

I did find a deficiency concerning the recognition of the full salvation in Jesus, as well as in the care for the souls, who are already His; I was also able to do away with some of the narrow minded ideas of one of the brothers which could have done some harm to them. The brothers have learned much, according to their own words. Especially they learned to carry one another with love and to see each other through Jesus. In spite of what it may look like to a human eye in its dry state, I hope that this field will become a beautiful garden to the Lord. The young, but excited worker Wasili Martscheff (who became a Christian through my witnessing in 1881) was especially happy to see me again. It is his decision to leave all for Jesus and to serve Him. One thing I fear is that there will not be other workers for this field that have not died to themselves.<sup>42</sup>

During the October 1888 trip to Rustchuk, Kargel was not able to go to Kazanluk but in May 1889, on his return from an extended trip to Israel, he managed to visit that congregation as well as the Rustchuk congregation on his way to St. Petersburg. This 1889 trip through Bulgaria brings to light the difficulties of life in the south-eastern portion of the country and possibly points to one of the reasons that the Kargels left Bulgaria. As Kargel travelled in the Kazanluk area, he mentioned that travel was

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for me on the banks of the Danube. And I as able to see some of the dear souls who had become children of God earlier, but also some brothers that have since become Christians. Also I found out that there is a good many that are searching for Christ. I am happy to see that the Lord did not go without a witness during my absence'.

<sup>40</sup> Johann Kargel to Vasilii Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], October 25, 1888, 2/13/60, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Angelov, 'The Baptist Movement in Bulgaria', p.11.

<sup>42</sup> Johann Kargel to Vasilii Aleksandrovich [Pashkov], November 15, 1888, October 25, 1888, 2/13/62, Pashkov Papers.

difficult and food was scarce.<sup>43</sup> All in all, he was hopeful and happy that he was finally able to return to the congregation where he baptised the first believers in Bulgaria and yet he was not entirely content with their spiritual condition and still felt a pull to pastor them:

Yesterday we had two blessed gatherings, and today, if the Lord so permits, we will have another and in the end we will be breaking bread together. I am sorry that the brothers here are stingy, but I am hoping that the Lord will give them the light yet; I am also hoping that my passing through here, even if very short, will not prove fruitless.<sup>44</sup>

Kargel's departure unfortunately was at a very difficult time for the Bulgarian Baptist churches. The three-year old churches in Kazanluk and Rustchuk were not ready to stand on their own against the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the superstitious society. The Bulgarian church had struggled for three years until 1887 when Marchehev returned from Hamburg and put the work back on track developing new works and a program for education.

## Conclusion

1. The early Bulgarian Baptists were native Bulgarians who came to an understanding of the need for adult immersion baptism through personal study of Scripture combined with an exposure to thoughts written by non-Bulgarians. The original group of Bulgarians were not exposed to aggressive or even mild forms of proselytism by Baptists yet they heard, understood and accepted the Christian message as held by Baptists Europe-wide.
2. The early Bulgarian Baptists did not seek to baptise themselves as others in the Baptist movement notoriously did. They chose to wait 6 years so that they could be recognised by the broader movement of European Baptists.
3. Tensions of canonical territory did not occur until it was clear that the Kargels were intent on baptising Bulgarians. The initial baptism in Kazanluk was not commonly known in Rustchuk where they lived. Once their ministry became known in Rustchuk, the local forces, including parish leaders together with the police, attempted to make their lives difficult by breaking up meetings, arresting leaders and permitting unfounded rumours to circulate. In the discussion of canonical territories, it would seem that the chief deciding factor was the perceived change in the ethnic identity of the

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<sup>43</sup> Johann Kargel to Friend and Brother in Christ [Pashkov], May 8/20, 1889, 2/13/77, Pashkov Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



common citizen rather than the political discussions for religious freedom being carried out at the government level.

4. The ongoing growth of the early Bulgarian Baptist movement did require outside help in the early stages; first in the form of an experienced Baptist pastor and second in the form of a national who was trained abroad. These two forms of outside assistance provided the Bulgarian Baptist movement the momentum it needed to eventually create and maintain and develop its own Bulgarian expression of the Baptist faith.

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# 10

## Orthodox and Baptists: Learning from Each Other's Spiritual Tradition

Petya Zareva

### Introduction

Arriving early for my appointment I was allowed to wait in the office of an Orthodox theologian while he was being interviewed by a Bulgarian journalist working for one of the evangelical magazines. I enjoyed listening to his answers to some very interesting questions. He is a famous Orthodox theologian, author of many articles and several books, and a professor in Bulgarian universities.<sup>1</sup> Imagine my amazement when I heard this rather intolerant response to the question, 'What does the Orthodox Church think of the evangelical Christians in Bulgaria?' The answer was straight: 'The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and its leaders consider evangelicals as heretics. All Protestant churches are sects and evangelicals have a negative impact on the Orthodox faith because of their Western roots'.<sup>2</sup>

I could not believe my ears! Bearing in mind that we live in a century of pluralism and globalisation, I was expecting a more tolerant opinion. I was wrong. Obviously the official position of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church had not changed, although Bulgarian evangelicals could witness some good relationships on the academic level. For example, some professors from the Orthodox Theological Faculty come and teach in the Evangelical Theological Faculty on a regular basis. Reciprocating this spirit of ecumenism, evangelical theologians are being invited to teach and lecture at conferences organised by Orthodox professors, but it is rather rare.

What about the 'real' situation on the level of everyday life? Why do the Orthodox keep calling Protestants 'traitors', accusing them of betraying the

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<sup>1</sup> Konstantin Zlatev teaches the courses 'Survey of the Eastern Orthodox Church' and 'Relationships between Different Confessions in Bulgaria'. He has written articles for many evangelical periodicals, thus demonstrating his friendship and appreciation to evangelical believers. His attitude has been openly disliked by many conservative Orthodox leaders. At the same time, he has been critical of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and its leaders because of their strong relations with the former Communist leaders who also used to persecute Orthodox Christians for their faith.

<sup>2</sup> A recent proof of this was a hostile article in one of the Bulgarian newspapers. The author was commenting on one of the new charismatic groups and their meetings, saying that the members of the 'dangerous sect end in the psychiatric clinics or finally commit suicide'. It was added that the sect is constantly supported by American missions. Ivailo Donchev, 'Opasna Sekta see chudesa' [Dangerous sect sows miracles], *24 Chasa* [24 hours], (16 July 2005), p. 1.

national<sup>3</sup> Christian tradition?<sup>4</sup> At the same time Protestants boast of their assurance of being saved and laugh at the 'simplicity' of the Orthodox religion.<sup>5</sup> It is a 'public secret' that the average Orthodox Christian<sup>6</sup> has never read the Bible and barely knows the difference between the Old and the New Testaments. Many feel it is enough to go to the Orthodox Church and light a candle, and that doing the ritual is sufficient. Orthodox believers can rightly accuse the Protestants of not knowing the days of the saints and not keeping them. Baptists, for example, are sceptical about the religion of their Orthodox 'brothers' who attend church twice a year—at Christmas (Orthodox call it 'the Birth of Christ'), and at Easter (Velikden—the Great Day of Resurrection) and still pretend they are the 'only true Christians'. Differences are expressed also in language. Orthodox people have their own names for Christmas and Easter, and avoid translation from Western languages, which is rather commendable.

Being a third generation Baptist and a theologian, living in a complex reality in a small border town whose citizens demonstrate a nationalistic tendency (i.e., to be Bulgarian means to be Orthodox), I was provoked to investigate the roots and the essence of Orthodox spirituality. I have been raised Baptist with the words of the local Orthodox priest ringing in my ears, 'If I had the power, I would kill all the evangelicals in this town. They have left the faith of their fathers and now they try to steal sheep from my flock'. However, in an age of pluralism and globalisation, it would be difficult to claim that 'one theology and church practice is right and all others wrong', as Nigel Wright put it, but 'instead there are differing ways of being church that are supported by competing theologies, each of which

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<sup>3</sup> See Parush Parushev, "On Some Developments in Russian Orthodox Theology and Tradition," in Ian M. Randall, (ed.), *Baptists and the Orthodox Church: On the Way to Understanding* (Prague: IBTS, 2003), p. 82. Parushev rightly explains that 'for many people in Eastern Europe... Orthodoxy is much more than simply a church; it is an entire way of life and culture'.

<sup>4</sup> For example, on the Feast of the Dormition, 15 August, according to tradition you are not allowed to do any domestic work. If a Protestant is seen working in his garden or vacuuming his house, he will be cursed and called a heretic. At the same time, if the day is a normal working day, all Orthodox Christians attend their place of work but do not see this as a violation of tradition. Of course, they all cook on this day and wash their dishes.

<sup>5</sup> For many in Bulgaria, Orthodox religion is reduced to lighting candles and kissing icons, which evangelicals see as a vain ritual, and, because the Bible forbids worshipping images, as akin to idol worship.

<sup>6</sup> According to the *Bulgarian Encyclopedia*, 85% of Bulgarian citizens define themselves as Christians. They would be greatly offended if you called them otherwise. Although, recently Bulgarians could witness rather curious testimonies: while being interviewed on national television one of the Bulgarian deputies, when asked about his religious preferences, called himself an Orthodox Atheist—and he was completely serious! After the fall of communism all the politicians started going to the big Orthodox cathedrals, lighting candles and crossing themselves. A few years ago the same people were committed atheists who mocked God and persecuted Christians. See, *Bulgarska Entsiklopedia* [Bulgarian Encyclopedia] of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Sofia, BG: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences/Publishing House "Trud"/ Sirma Group, 1999), p. 145.

has its own coherence and integrity'.<sup>7</sup> I believe strongly that both Orthodox and evangelicals (Baptists) have played their important roles in Bulgarian society. I start with the conviction that they can exist together, being partners and not rivals, by learning from each other. Orthodox and Baptists need each other on the Bulgarian scene and they can only profit if they appreciate and use the positive elements of each other's traditions.

In my research I use the views of several Christians, both Orthodox and Baptists. I am sure they represent the 'mood' of both sides which is of help in finding out the real situation. The majority of my examples of evangelical belief will be drawn from my personal experiences within the Baptist tradition which is one of the oldest Protestant traditions on the Bulgarian scene.<sup>8</sup>

Bulgaria is an Orthodox country with a living tradition. To understand any religious body, it is important to be informed of the national and religious context. In Bulgaria, Orthodox tradition and cultural identity are predominant. Every attempt to serve the Lord universally without taking into consideration the specific context with its national characteristics and elements will fail.<sup>9</sup> This is a challenge for the Baptists in Bulgaria. Baptists need contextualisation. The goal of this paper is to show that both Baptists and Orthodox can give much to their fellow Bulgarian contemporaries if only they keep in mind the right perspective—that is, if they live their theology.<sup>10</sup> Bulgarian Baptists are a minority in a country with a strong religious tradition.<sup>11</sup> Through the centuries Bulgarian monasteries have been the places which kept alive Christian faith and identity in Bulgaria.<sup>12</sup> Bulgarian evangelicals (Baptists) should keep this aspect of Bulgarian Orthodoxy in mind.

One can agree with Velislav Altunov that, 'if they want to be strong in their witness for Christ, evangelical Christians do not have any other option but to show deep respect, love and appreciation for the individual identity of every single Bulgarian, having in mind the specific national

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<sup>7</sup> Nigel G. Wright, *New Baptists, New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Konstantin Zlatev, "Hristianstvoto na Balkanskia Poluostrov" [Christianity on the Balkan Peninsula] in Earle C. Cairns, *Hristianstvoto Prez Vekovete* [Christianity through the centuries] (Sofia: New Man Publishing House, 1998), p. 644.

<sup>9</sup> Velislav Altunov, "Grehat 'Filetizam'" [The 'Sin' 'Philetism'], in *Balgarsko Bogoslovie* [Bulgarian theology] 4 (2002), p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> *Bulgarian Encyclopedia*, p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> Paisij Hilendarski, *Istoria Slavjanobulgarska* [Slavonic-Bulgarian history] (Sofia, BG: PH, Zachari Stoanov, 2002), pp. 210-215.

characteristics of Bulgarian society as a whole".<sup>13</sup> However, it would be wrong to see Baptists as 'alien' to Bulgarian culture. The evangelical contribution to Bulgaria's national tradition is significant.

This paper argues that Bulgarian Orthodox Christians could be more open to the contributions of Bulgarian Baptists to Bulgarian society and recall that times of communist persecution involved common experiences for each religious group.<sup>14</sup>

## **Baptists and Orthodox: Knowing and respecting each other**

Why should we learn from others? Orthodox Christians claim they believe in the Scriptures but they hardly read the Bible. At the same time, many of them are very fervent in doing the rituals and keeping the days of the saints, which have become a part of the Bulgarian national tradition.<sup>15</sup> Evangelicals (Baptists) can be very fluent in their knowledge of the Bible, but they may not have a clue about the church calendar or Christian festivals related to saints' days. It is obvious that both evangelicals and Orthodox need to learn. What should be the real actions? An Orthodox theologian gives the following advice to Protestants:

If Protestants are led by their sincere desire for good relationships with the Orthodox they could do the following things: they could go to an Orthodox church on Sunday or any other holiday, thus trying to learn the sense of the church, not as an architectural piece of art, but as a place for meeting God; they could read the Orthodox catechism, it is not long and gives the main information which can be very useful; it is a wonderful thing to visit some of the monasteries and try to understand their deep sense and atmosphere, especially on the day when many Christians gather there; they could try to understand the meaning of Orthodox fasting. Evangelicals need to understand that the tradition is the living connection between the different generations of Bulgarians. If the Orthodox priest is not conformed to the requirements of the Bible, they can always find sincere Christians with deep faith among the lay people in the Orthodox Church.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Altunov, "The Sin 'Philetism'," p. 139.

<sup>14</sup> Hristo Kulichev, *Heralds of the Truth: A History of The Evangelical Churches in Bulgaria*, 2<sup>nd</sup> English.ed., (Sofia, BG: Bulgarian Bible Society, 1994), p. 86.

<sup>15</sup> As Emil Bartos rightly put it, the Orthodox Church believes in synergism, the collaboration between the divine and human for salvation. This means that salvation is achieved through good deeds, which are the fruit of grace working in human beings. See his 'Salvation in the Orthodox Church', in Randall (ed.), *Baptists and the Orthodox Church*, p. 50.

<sup>16</sup> An interview with Konstantin Zlatev on 26 August 2005, available through the author (here and further in the text, the translation of the quotations from the interviews are mine).

This advice can be easily followed if the evangelicals or Baptists remind themselves that they are not the only ones who need to be accepted and understood. It is impossible to understand the other person if you do not know them and have a distorted idea or a prejudice regarding their activity and beliefs. Is there anything Orthodox should do? Is the advice quoted to be applied by Orthodox Christians, too? I would argue that it is. There is a need for openness, to build relationships and learn Baptist traditions. Let me quote the opinion of Revd Vasil Vasilev, the current President of the Baptist Union of Bulgaria:

The weapon of Christ and his gospel has always been 'love'. During my ministry of forty years I have found out that no one could resist love, no matter what he called himself—Orthodox, Gypsy or Pomak. I was raised in an Orthodox family and I have always cherished the tradition. I know that we will all be successful in the field of the Lord if we witness with love, not by aggressive words or deeds, but by a Christ-like life. As the Lord Jesus Christ accepted people without making differences and by loving their souls, thus we should remember that all people are equally precious to the Lord. We will be closer to our Orthodox contemporaries if we are able to show by our life of love that we know the Christ of the Bible, not just to boast that we know all about it. We can know the Bible by heart and at the same time our life can be a negative witness for all around us. The key of fellowship is respect to others and love, which cannot be resisted, remembering the biblical principle, to pray for every one, even for the enemies.<sup>17</sup>

No Christian tradition is self-sufficient. Respect, love and openness are key words for building bridges between different religious traditions. One Baptist Christian shares about her mother:

My mother was an Orthodox. She was illiterate and rarely went to church. However, she had a strong faith and sincere trust in the Lord. She only knew the Jesus Prayer and a part of Psalm 91, but she never blamed God for her difficult life (her husband died when she was 30, leaving her with three small children and no money). Just the opposite, she always repeated that we were all alive because the Lord had been merciful to us and never left us.<sup>18</sup>

No doubt there is a deep piety that can be found in Orthodoxy. This is piety worth being followed. Zlatev adds: 'Talking to others we should never aim to convert them or change their beliefs. We should try to achieve

<sup>17</sup> An interview with Vasil Vasilev, taken on 28 August 28, 2005, available through the author.

<sup>18</sup> An interview with Jordanka Lubenova, a member of Petrich Baptist Church since 1965, taken on 20 August 2005, available through the author.

a mutual respect for our beliefs and become closer in order to have a successful and blessed relationship which can serve for developing harmony and mutual benefit'.<sup>19</sup>

In a personal context my friendship with Orthodox helped me to realise some other elements which support mutual learning: that evangelicals would be easily accepted if they stopped claiming that they 'own' the only way to God; they should forgive their Orthodox neighbours if they have been insulted by them; they should accept the Orthodox as real brothers and sisters, who also know God, but in their own way;<sup>20</sup> they should read some of the writings of the early Fathers, so they could be penetrated by the spirit of the Orthodox Church tradition; they should make efforts to make friends with Orthodox people, having in mind that barriers are created by humans, not by the Spirit of God.<sup>21</sup>

What should the Orthodox learn from Baptists? I will quote an opinion of a lay Orthodox Christian:

I am impressed by the discipline of the Baptists. I see them go to church regularly, even on Wednesdays, always bringing their Bibles. I would like to be so disciplined regarding churchgoing. But I go only when I can, or when I am having problems. Baptists always have answers for my questions; when I want to know something from the Bible, they find a verse to explain it. I am very impressed by their love too. They always have guests and visitors, even from abroad. Sometimes they see them for the first time, but they start behaving like they have known each others for years. I like the idea of going to my Baptist neighbour and asking her to pray for my problem. She never says 'no'. She is always responsive and this is a big relief for me, to know that someone cares for me and takes my problems seriously.<sup>22</sup>

So, it is obvious, that Orthodox can learn from Baptists too: close fellowship, mutual spiritual support, faith that aims at a transformed life. If Orthodox Christians come to a Baptist prayer meeting they would witness a family atmosphere where those present share their needs and count on others for spiritual support. They would learn that Baptists believe in the power of prayer and in a God who still does miracles—changing lives of

<sup>19</sup> Zlatev, interview, 26 August, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Nigel Wright observes that 'we may indeed wish to argue that one theology has the edge over others but we are likely to find that there are aspects to being church that any one model will overlook. As a consequence we need the enrichment of ecclesiologies that inform, challenge and to a degree complement each other'. See his *New Baptists, New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> Zlatev, interview, 26 August, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> An interview with S.N., taken on 23 August 2005, available through the author.

alcoholics and drug addicts, making them fervent Christians.<sup>23</sup> Orthodox would learn that by praying aloud, Baptists encourage each other and express their firm belief of the presence of the Lord, as James Wm. McClendon, Jr. puts it: 'their prayers presume a present Hearer with power to grant that petition'.<sup>24</sup>

Andrew Murray added another important truth: 'prayer is the voice of our life. As a man lives so he prays... he who seeks to live with God will learn to know His mind and to please Him, so that he will be able to pray according to His will'.<sup>25</sup> So the Orthodox would learn that for the Baptist prayer is not only asking things from God but also a way for a deeper relationship with Him in which He reveals Himself in a supernatural way, which is comparable to the way of prayer depicted by the Hesychasts in the Orthodox Church. Both Baptists and Orthodox can learn from each other. The experience of God is so rich and multifaceted that it takes more than one Christian tradition to express it.

## Orthodox and Baptists learning from each other

From their early days in Bulgaria, Baptists have been involved in different ministries and activities, thus showing their faith in practice.<sup>26</sup> This tendency has been followed over many years and is still dominant. Activism has become one of the central features of Bulgarian Baptist spirituality. In general, Orthodoxy is much more passive. Orthodox Christians usually do not define their religious life through 'doing' or 'having ministries' or 'setting up projects'. This may be one reason why Baptists are often considered to represent a 'foreign' faith; and to a certain extent it represents 'Western activism'. Does it mean Baptists have lost their national identity? Do they not respect their tradition and local rituals and celebrations? The answer is more complicated than simple.

The Orthodox Christians are right in claiming that Baptists are 'foreign' because they follow a Western pattern of religion which is distant from the Eastern one. Bulgarian evangelicals (Baptists) sing mostly English and American songs, which have been translated, but keep the Western tune. These are very different from the songs sung in the Orthodox churches that follow the old Slavonic style of church singing. Evangelicals mainly use theological resources produced by western authors. Besides, as

<sup>23</sup> Borislav Krachunov, 'Az bjah edin ot tiah' [I was one of them], *Prozoretz*, 3 (2003), pp.22-23.

<sup>24</sup> *Systematic Theology: Doctrine. Volume II* (Nashville: Abington, 1994), p. 155.

<sup>25</sup> *The Inner Life: Cultivating the Renewal of the Soul* (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 1984), p. 151.

<sup>26</sup> McClendon calls 'presence' a virtue of being there for others, which is one of the profound forms of Christian witness; see his *Systematic Theology: Ethics. Volume I* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), pp. 107-108.



Altunov rightly notes, the translations are not always in accordance with Bulgarian reality, because the Bulgarian way of thinking and its cultural model is very much different from that of the West.<sup>27</sup> Parush R. Parushev argues that the representatives of the East have a narrative way of thinking and those of the West apply a logical way of thinking.<sup>28</sup> This would explain why the Bulgarian Orthodox believers are so attracted by stories of the saints, their lives and miracles. They would readily read them, even to the extent of neglecting the Bible and interpretation of biblical texts, which in Western tradition involves rational-logical thinking. Parushev concludes that obviously we need help if we want to understand our differing traditions, but this does not mean that West and East must confront each other all the time. They need a constructive discussion because actually they complement each other.<sup>29</sup> Traditions of Christian spirituality 'are not derived from abstract theory but from attempts to live out gospel values in a positive yet critical way within a specific historical and cultural context'.<sup>30</sup>

As for the Orthodox they are used to a mystical church atmosphere and have an image of God who is transcendent.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, Baptists seem to view a God who is easily approached. They put the emphasis on His love, leaving rituals aside. The Baptist church has no icons, thus lacking an atmosphere that would create a sense of awe within the worshipper. In so doing Bulgarian Baptists go far from their cultural context. So, what do Baptists need to do in order to become closer to their national tradition? I will quote the opinion of Father Vasil Panov,<sup>32</sup> a priest in St Petka's Church in my native town, Petrich:

I will be happy if I see evangelicals reading the lives of the saints. They are very encouraging and thrilling; they will learn that the Orthodox believers have also suffered for their faith and won battles. They will know that Orthodox fasting has a great power to clean the body and strengthen the soul. They will read examples of the importance of the Jesus Prayer.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>27</sup> "The Sin 'Philetism'," p. 124, note 1.

<sup>28</sup> "East and West : A Theological Conversation," *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 1:1 (2000), pp. 31-44.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, pp.43-44.

<sup>30</sup> Steven Chase, *Contemplation and Compassion: The Victorian Tradition* (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> See S. Parenti (ed.), *Praying with the Orthodox Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1989), p. xi.

<sup>32</sup> I am indebted to Fr. Vasil for giving me the book of Gavrail Dinev, *Characteristic Elements of the Heroic Life of the Russian Monks of the XIX Century* (Sofia: Forum Bulgaria – Russia, 2004). I learned that the goal of those heroic acts is spiritual. The aim was achieving the Kingdom of God and new grace for the everyday path of the believer. I was amazed by the deeds of the depicted heroes who lived in solitude, ate barely nothing, did miracles and showed love to others.

<sup>33</sup> An interview with Father Vasil, 31 August, 2005, available through the author.

Commenting on the loss of transcendence and the need for evangelicals to learn from the Orthodox, Mark W. G. Stibbe suggests that Western Christianity should present a more balanced picture of God, not over-emphasising the Lord's immanence but recovering a sense of His greatness.<sup>34</sup> This is also a correction that can be helpful for Bulgarian Baptists. In addition, they should try to present a balanced picture of a Trinitarian God, not putting stress only on Jesus. Talking about the situation of evangelicals in the post-communist world, Lina Andronoviene and Parush Parushev point out that evangelicals should leave behind their 'trench' mentality. It must be done in order to show a readiness to be changed; otherwise evangelicals will be wrapped up by a 'rival' tradition which has offered a better way for resolving the existing problem.<sup>35</sup> To a certain extent, Orthodox are right in criticising Baptist tradition, which cannot offer ready answers to all questions, but needs to continue the process of development.

However, there are examples which prove that the accusations of the Orthodox towards Baptists are not always well-founded. Baptists are not totally 'foreign' in the country; there are several spheres where they make serious efforts to 'contextualise' their faith and spiritual practice. Several of them have taken a step forward to understanding the Orthodox tradition. For example, the son and the grandson of Dimitar Apostolov, who was one of the most respected and successful Baptist pastors,<sup>36</sup> were educated in the Theological Academy of the Orthodox Church. When asked why they did this, the answer was that they wanted to be better prepared to serve in a context which is almost one-hundred per cent Orthodox. They added that they have never regretted this decision. That way they started to develop and improve their critical thinking, trying to decide for themselves what the answers are. Stojcho Apostolov said that he was able to know the psychology of Bulgarians better. He learned how to consider the Eastern

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<sup>34</sup> *A Kingdom of Priests: Deeper into God in Prayer* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1994), pp. 118-120.

<sup>35</sup> 'Church, State and Culture: On the Complexities of the Post-Soviet Evangelical Social Involvement', *Theological Reflections*, EAAA Journal of Theology, # 3 (2004), pp. 194-212. This is absolutely true, as nowadays we can see people from evangelical churches moving to the Orthodox. I was impressed by the testimony of a former Presbyterian minister who converted to the Orthodox faith, not because the Protestant faith was wrong but because it was incomplete. The turning point for his decision was the writing of the Holy Fathers.

<sup>36</sup> Revd Apostolov converted while working as a lieutenant in the local police. After his conversion he was persecuted for his faith; he lost his job and he and his family were threatened by the communist government. He was not always understood by his Baptist brothers because he has always had wonderful relationships with the Orthodox Christians and a special friendship with Sister Valentina, a nun in one of the famous Bulgarian monasteries. He has always shared that he received inspiration from the conversations with Sister Valentina. He was very impressed by her prayer life, too, mentioning that it was exemplary for the Baptists. His family has kept the tradition of those friendly relations since his death in 2004.

way of thinking.<sup>37</sup> Those Baptist pastors were among the most respected evangelical leaders and at the same time had better access to understanding Orthodox tradition and the opportunity for dialogue with it,<sup>38</sup> thanks to their education.

The next example is even more challenging to some conservative Baptists. On 12 February 2005, in the Bulgarian capital Sofia, a new religious community was registered with a 'strange' name: Christian Universal and Apostolic Church.<sup>39</sup> The pastor, Velislav Altunov, was ordained by both Protestant and Orthodox ministers. The Russian bishop Aleksey Dardenij from the Russian Orthodox Reformed church shared that his attendance in that ordination was an interesting historical fact. He stated that this was an example of Christian unity and he was very happy that he found people in Bulgaria who thought freely without being burdened by the past. The new pastor Altunov explained: 'we need to pay the cost of the new thing which is being born. This is something better, which is constructive and I am sure it is favoured by the Lord'.<sup>40</sup> The new church combines Protestant and Orthodox ways of worship. They give a central place to the sermon, reduce the time of the whole service, and use icons as pieces of art, not as objects of worship. Candles are also used in worship.

Also on a wider scale, evangelicals have realised the need to be open to other worship traditions. Bradley Holt said:

The twentieth century has seen the development of Christian faith on a global scale, in some sense fulfilling the promise of the first centuries. It is time now for Christians to listen not only to the writers of the past, but also to the peoples of the present from different cultural traditions.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, becoming acquainted with the example of the Hesychasts and their Jesus Prayer method could be a starting point for evangelicals for dialogue with their Orthodox neighbours.<sup>42</sup> It would bring

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<sup>37</sup> An interview with Radoslav Apostolov and Stojcho Apostolov, 1 September, 2005, available through the author.

<sup>38</sup> Sheldrake suggests that, instead of the traditional 'dialectical dialogue', Christian theology needs to accept a 'dialogic dialogue' that is open to the values of the other. See his *Spirituality and Theology*, p. 60.

<sup>39</sup> The article describing this event can be found in 'New Religious Community in Bulgaria', *Evangeliski vestnik*, [Evangelical newspaper], 25 February 2005, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> A personal interview with Velislav Altunov, taken at UTF, Sofia on 12 June 2005, available through the author. Altunov is an Orthodox graduate too. He finished the Orthodox Theological Academy and presently he is doing his doctorate in the New Bulgarian University. He is the author of many articles and also teaches at the Evangelical Theological Faculty.

<sup>41</sup> *A Brief History of Christian Spirituality: Thirsty for God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1993), p. 124.

<sup>42</sup> Morton Kelsey, *The Other Side of Silence* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 146.

them closer to their Orthodox Bulgarian contemporaries and to the national tradition as well.

As these examples show, there are Baptists in Bulgaria who are ready to listen to the Orthodox. In addition, Baptists can still do more if they want to walk halfway to the meeting point with their Orthodox neighbours. They could learn more about Orthodox mysticism, reading some books on the subject. They could even spend a day or two in an Orthodox monastery talking with the monks there. Thus, they would better understand the attractiveness of the atmosphere of this tradition. I would recommend that non-Orthodox Bulgarian theological students organise retreats where they could spend time alone with the Lord in prayer and reading the Scripture (just for themselves, not for writing projects). Thomas Merton acknowledges that 'our silence and our prayers do more to bring people to the knowledge of God than all our words about Him'.<sup>43</sup> Paraphrasing Merton, we can say that our prayers are crucial also in bringing different traditions closer to each other. What and how can the Orthodox learn from Baptists? This will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Baptist spirituality is shaped by striving for close fellowship. They also read the Bible regularly. Specifically these elements are mentioned by Father Vasil as areas where Bulgarian Orthodox spirituality needs to develop:

The Bulgarian Orthodox Christians are traditional, not canonical. They follow the example of their fathers and forefathers who were illiterate, and that is why they needed the inspiration of the icons and the candles. These things are important and should stay. But modern Bulgarians will need to go a long way before they realise that they need a change. Some of them still live in fear, because only fifteen years ago coming to church was connected with persecution and risk. Today the situation is changed but the 'tradition' is still there. That is, in the Orthodox sense the tradition is reduced to lighting a candle, kissing an icon and going to the cathedral from time to time. Priests encourage lay Christians to read the Bible, but this is a new thing for them and they will need some time before they get used to it. At the same time, I must admit that some Orthodox Christians are very fervent in doing the rituals and keeping the days of the saints, but knowing the Bible is still a priority we should advance.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *No Man is an Island* (Tunbridge Wells, England: Burns and Oates, 1991), p. 225.

<sup>44</sup> Fr. Vasil, interview, 31 August 2005.

Bulgarian Baptists have been on the Bulgarian scene long enough to know that they cannot change their neighbours by forcing them to accept Baptist convictions. They have learned, however, that they can show their faith following the biblical principle of showing the character of Jesus. There are several examples of Baptists who have witnessed to their Orthodox neighbours for Christ using biblical means without trying to proselytise them. Some of the most powerful examples are the result of friendships. An experienced Baptist believer used to show love and respect to a younger Orthodox friend, respecting her beliefs and encouraging her to read the Bible. They met and talked on regular basis discussing interesting passages. The Baptist assured the Orthodox that the Bible is real and powerful, just as the Lord is real. Amazingly for the Orthodox and her parents, several months later she confessed that after reading the Bible she had the strength to quit smoking after twenty years of trying to stop. She said that she had tried all other possible means but in vain. She realised the need of becoming part of the Baptist community, but she respected her parents will to stay and worship in the Orthodox Church. She keeps meeting her Baptist friend, discussing the Bible with her, and encourages her friends and colleagues to do the same.

Another successful practice is the organising of Alpha courses<sup>45</sup> whose goal is to present the Bible in an informal atmosphere. Baptists normally invite their non-Christian or Orthodox friends and neighbours and they have the chance to know each other and to share the Bible while discussing family matters or other interesting topics. The idea is to show biblical principles and at the same time they are an opportunity to share the Christian faith in an age of immorality and the degradation of society as a whole. The other goal of the Alpha courses is to show that Baptists have a high respect for family values thanks to the respect shown to the Bible and its principles. Alpha courses are organised for young people, students and prisoners too. For the last several years many young people have been converted thanks to the things learned in the Alpha courses where Baptists have invited their non-Christian friends and colleagues in order to introduce them to the Bible and to other Christians.

One of the most respected Baptist veterans used to demonstrate his convictions by showing love to people in pain and grief. Every day he spent an hour or two in the hospitals or cemeteries talking to lonely people and telling them of the gospel and the love of God, quoting verses from the Bible. He was not aiming to convert them or make them a part of the Baptist community. His goal was to make them familiar with the Word of

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<sup>45</sup> See, online <http://www.alphacourse.org>, accessed on 14 March 2006.

God which had changed his own life. This is not the only example. As Altunov claims 'evangelicals are very active sharing their faith in shops, busses, trains and public places without fear of persecution. They give brochures and gospel portions, inviting non-believers to attend their meetings'.<sup>46</sup> Thus they show that they belong to a community which is of significant importance for them. Those examples prove the words of McClendon who said that the Baptist vision allows different applications of the Bible, 'depending on time and place, and, of course, on the individuality of Scripture in each time and place'.<sup>47</sup> The goal of Baptists should be to show Christ Who is honoured by Orthodox and Baptists although in different ways.

### **Orthodox spirituality and Baptist spirituality: Where is the common ground?**

Both Orthodox and Baptist spirituality are Christ-centred. It can be said that both found their doctrines in the Scriptures and affirm scriptural authority, though they may differ in practice. It should be a good common ground for a start. Both respect the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. Unfortunately, in the Bulgarian Orthodox setting, finding common ground is not easy. In the new era of the last 15 years the Orthodox Church has regained its leading position as the 'traditional' church of the country<sup>48</sup> and the Protestant churches still bear the stigma of 'sect'.<sup>49</sup> As Kris Angelov mentioned, 'It is regrettable that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church does not have dialogue or ecumenical relations with any of the other confessions in the country. Rather, the Orthodox Church maintains through all possible means its status as the only true church in Bulgaria and looks down upon other faiths'.<sup>50</sup>

But if cooperation is limited on the church level, still there are many opportunities to find mutual understanding on the level of relationships

<sup>46</sup> See online, <http://www.center-religiousfreedom.com/bg.html>, accessed on 13 March 2006.

<sup>47</sup> McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Doctrine*, p.46.

<sup>48</sup> As Kris Angelov rightly put it: 'It is very difficult to maintain that there is a separation between church and state when the government continues to exercise influence and pressure in religious affairs. Such influence was demonstrated in the summer of 2004 when the government took the decision to interfere in the ten-year-old controversy within the Orthodox Church, taking the side of the Synod of Patriarch Maxim (who was put in power by the Communists many years ago) and using legal measures and police force on a national scale to take over the offices and property of the alternative Synod, and in some cases to arrest clergy who refused to leave their churches'. See his 'The Social and Religious Situation in Bulgaria Today, with Special reference to the Protestant Church', *Frontier*, Spring (2005), pp. 23-24.

<sup>49</sup> Commenting on the relations with other faiths, especially Protestantism, the Orthodox theologian Zachari Konkoyov admits that there have been no relationships on the clerical level, only at the academic level (in his 'Religious Situation in Bulgaria Today, with Special Reference to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the Period 1989-2004', *Frontier*, Spring (2005), p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> Angelov, 'The Social and Religious Situation in Bulgaria Today', p.24.

between church members. One possible way of coming together and finding uniting elements in the two traditions is through learning from each other on a personal level and through making friendships and knowing each other more closely. Besides, believers from both churches share a common 'bulgarianism'. Bulgarians were strong enough to 'bulgarianise the American missionaries in the nineteenth century, instead of the opposite'.<sup>51</sup> There is a good prospect that Orthodox and Protestants will find enough strength to realise that they are all Bulgarians who love their country and confess one Lord Jesus Christ who died for them all.

Both Orthodox and Baptist Christians have common ground in the practice of prayer. They are committed to prayer and regard prayer as a main practice and a significant part of Christian worship.<sup>52</sup> I argue that Baptists would benefit from using the Jesus Prayer in their prayer life. It can help a believer to enter into the 'world of prayer'. Stibbe is very right in saying that the beginning of prayer is always critical and actually the hardest thing.<sup>53</sup> Because prayer normally consists of thanksgiving and petitions, why not start it with the petition for mercy and confession of our sinful nature, which is the essence of the Jesus Prayer which was such a strong weapon for the Bulgarian Hesychasts? This would be a good point for humbling ourselves before the Lord and admitting His sovereign power. In so doing Baptists would move a step further toward the Orthodox. Prayer also opens other areas for mutual understanding and respect. Intercessory prayers for each other constitute, as Rob Warner explains, a practice of 'Christian principle of interdependence'.<sup>54</sup> This would show Orthodox Christians that they are considered fellow brothers in the faith and that they are highly appreciated. The same message is rendered to Baptists when their Orthodox neighbours pray for them.

The other common ground is the person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, in whose name Christians pray. As both Orthodox and Baptists believe in His Lordship and power to save, this could be a starting point for dialogue instead of starting with a subject which could lead to a disagreement. A good example for successfully using common ground was the publishing of Millard Erickson's *Christian Theology* in Bulgarian. Evangelical publishers arranged the translation of the book, asking a

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<sup>51</sup> See Andrej Pantev, *Bulgarian Question in USA 1876-1903* (Veliko Turnovo, Velikotarnovski Universitet 'Kiril I Metodij', 1984), p. 73.

<sup>52</sup> McClendon claims that 'in a broad but true sense all worship is prayer', *Systematic theology: Doctrine*, p. 383.

<sup>53</sup> *A Kingdom of Priests*, p.12. Stibbe explains that prayer can be like physical exercise which requires good preparation.

<sup>54</sup> Rob Warner, *Walking with God: Discovering a Deeper Spirituality in Prayer* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), p. 198.

famous Orthodox theologian to be the editor. He agreed, adding about 30 pages of footnotes, explaining the common points and sometimes his disagreements, commenting on the Orthodox point of view. This project was very beneficial for both Orthodox and evangelicals as they were provided with a useful theological book which gives both Christian views at once.<sup>55</sup> A dialogue which leaves 'breathing space' for both traditions is possible. A similar example is available in the practice of the United Theological Faculty of the Evangelical Theological Institute. For the 'Liturgy' course, the faculty board invited an Orthodox priest and a Catholic priest who teach the course together with an evangelical lecturer. Thus the three theologians representing the main streams of Christianity provide a wider picture on the subject allowing the evangelical students to get first-hand information about worship in the Orthodox and the Catholic churches and to leave behind some of their prejudices connected with Orthodoxy and Catholicism.

Another possible common ground would be meditation. I am sure both Orthodox and Baptists need to spend more time with God in a state of meditation in order to hear His voice. Indeed, reading the Scriptures supports meditation, too. Those two practices could provide a good common ground for developing a 'conversational relationship with God'.<sup>56</sup> Brother Lawrence used to advise Christians to rejoice 'in the actual presence of God or... having an habitual, silent and secret conversation of the soul with God'.<sup>57</sup> He was able to keep his attitude even doing his everyday business. Another prayer which is common and used in both groups is the Lord's Prayer. Commenting on the first words of Lord's Prayer, ('Our Father'), Rob Warner claims the following:

Whenever we pray in this way together, we are invited to delight in all that we share. Whatever our differences of background or qualifications, abilities or income, gender, generation or race, in the opening phrase of the Lord's Prayer we acknowledge and choose to accept one another. As we truly pray these words, they anchor us to one another. We express inclusivity. We affirm not only that we belong to God, but also that we belong together.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> The editor is Prof. Dr. Totyo Koev. The book is especially useful because it provides both views in parallel, for example, regarding topics like sin, creation, redemption, sanctification. It is interesting to note that you will hardly find any difference when the topic is the person of Christ. The main differences are in the chapter about the church. See Millard Erickson, *Hristiqnsko Bogoslovie* [Christian theology, in Bulgarian] (Sofia: Nov Chovek, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> This is part of the title of Dallas Willard's book, *Hearing God; Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999). The author comments on hearing the voice of the Lord and the need of developing a personal relationship with the Lord.

<sup>57</sup> *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Old Tappan: Revell, 1958), pp. 37-38.

<sup>58</sup> *Praying with Jesus, Experiencing the Spiritual Riches of the Lord's Prayer* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), p. 6.



Warner's interpretation may help Orthodox and Baptists, when reading the Lord's Prayer together, to 'acknowledge and choose to accept one another'. It would be a step forward towards an ecumenical dialogue.

## Conclusion

This essay has argued that Orthodox Christians would benefit if they listened to their Baptist neighbours, who can advise them how to read the Bible and to apply its message in everyday life. Since prayer is a common element in both confessions, the contribution of Bulgarian Hesychasts and their prayer method could be very useful for Bulgarian evangelicals. At the same time it has argued that Orthodox believers can learn from their Baptist neighbours, finding out the power of non-written and especially intercessory prayer, which cannot be found in a prayer book or a catechism. Baptists, in turn, can expand and deepen their spirituality by using the simple Jesus Prayer, in order to achieve peace and unity with God. There are further opportunities in finding a common ground for Baptists and Orthodox on the basis of Christ-centred spirituality. Both traditions would agree on the central role of Jesus Christ. Besides, 'The tradition of the Church is not an object we possess, but a reality by which we are possessed. The Church's life has its source in God's act of revelation in Jesus Christ, and in the gift of the Holy Spirit to his people and his work in their history'.<sup>59</sup> Both Baptists and Orthodox should remember that 'no one of our traditions is the true church. The true church is something we have yet to become and we need each other's assistance for it to become a reality'.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, let both Orthodox and Baptists agree with Father Joan Shahovskoj that 'there are people born by the Spirit in every Christian stream and denomination. The Christian mark is love, because how should someone convince you to accept the faith of love without love'.<sup>61</sup>

An example of successful following of this advice is the life of Evtimka Simeonova. The first 40 years of her life were spent as an Orthodox Christian who kept the rituals and highly respected the tradition. She converted to the Baptist denomination after the loss of her younger

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<sup>59</sup> *The World Conference on Faith and Order* (Montreal, 1963), section II, art.56.

<sup>60</sup> Wright, *New Baptists, New Agenda*, p. 49.

<sup>61</sup> Joan Shahovskoj, "Pravoslavie v Sektantstvo i Sektantstvo v Pravoslaviето" [Orthodoxy in sectarianism and sectarianism in Orthodoxy], *Hristianstvo i Kultura* [Christianity and culture], 6 (2003), p. 30.

sister, when the rituals could not give her inner peace; she found peace in the evangelical message and through reading the Bible after being encouraged by Baptists. She was persecuted for her faith but endured as a victor, fighting for her religious rights and standing up for them. Her last 40 years were spent as a Baptist Christian. Her neighbours and friends listened to her Bible stories gladly and were willing to read the testimonies she gave them because she always smiled and behaved very kindly, never confronting Orthodox friends for their superstitions or rituals. She quoted verses from the Bible without being aggressive. She respected the opinions of others. Her neighbours knew she was praying for them. She was a rare case—‘a modern Baptist Hesychast’. She spent one third of her day in prayer. Often one of her prayers took three hours. She was delighted to live in the presence of the Lord and this was seen by others. As was the case in the lives of the ancient Hesychasts, her life attracted people and they kept coming to her, highly respecting her way of life.<sup>62</sup>

Why did I decide to finish with this story? This sweet lady passed to be with the Lord just 40 days ago, and as her closest and favourite niece, I had the privilege of collecting her belongings (she did not have children of her own). I found two books by her bedside: the Bible and the Lives of the Saints. Moreover, if I had been at home, I would have marked the occasion of 40 days since her death by taking flowers to her grave, where I would have thanked the Lord for her example. If I were an Orthodox I would have also lit a candle and distributed food. More important for me, though, is to know that her life was the perfect example of a follower of Christ who never paraded with titles, like Baptist or Orthodox, because she was both. That is why when she was asked about her convictions, the answer was: ‘I am a believer, who belongs to Christ and expects every good from him’. Isn’t that enough?

**Petya Zareva, Petrich, Bulgaria**

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<sup>62</sup> The life and example of Evtimka Simeonova is told in my essay, titled ‘Theology in Practice—A Life of a Saint in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’, unpublished material 2003, available through the author.

## 11

## **Presence and Proclamation: What might Baptists and Orthodox Learn from Each Other in the Pursuit of Christian Mission?**

James Purves

In this essay we will seek to explore and test a model for the development of a critical apparatus that might help in Baptist-Orthodox dialogue, in pursuing missional intentionality. This is an experimental theology, not a polemic or apologetic work: I write as a Baptist pastor from Western Europe, where we are faced with continued decline in overall church attendance and are wrestling with the challenge of being relevant and bearing witness within our context. As such, I recognise that neither what I know nor what I do is the best it can be. I am looking to improve on church effectiveness in mission within my own context, at home and with other partner churches. I am also part of a community of study and research at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, seeking to work out what it means to engage in mission in the wider European environment, including lands where the Orthodox tradition is rooted; and asking not only how we can bring the inherited wisdom and convictions of a baptistic way of faith to serve the purposes of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but also what we need to learn from our Orthodox brothers and sisters, in order to advance the Kingdom of God. It is out of this comparative analysis that I look for help in improving our effectiveness, locally and trans-locally, in touching others with the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

It should also be said that this essay does not seek to provide a comparative study of Evangelical and Orthodox methodologies or substantive theologies: this task was undertaken at an IBTS conference in 2002, the fruit of which is documented in an earlier publication.<sup>1</sup> What we are here engaged in is an attempt to extend this process, looking at how we can develop a more effective theological mechanism in developing missional practice.

What is at the heart of being church and bearing witness to Jesus Christ in an Orthodox context? My own exposure to the Orthodox has

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<sup>1</sup> Ian M Randall (Ed), *Baptists and the Orthodox Church: On the Way of Understanding* (Prague: IBTS, 2003).

come through visits to Bulgaria and Russia. What struck me most was the close identification of Orthodoxy with the land of the nations in which it has been contextualised, together with the importance attached to sacred space. The emphasis upon the physicality of Presence as over against my propositional belief was startling. To enter the great Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia or the newly rebuilt Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow is to be faced with an extraordinary volume of space and a sense of pride and identification with a tradition rooted in the lives of a Christian confession which binds civic identity to the witness of centuries past. This is not just in the great cathedrals. Newly erected Orthodox church buildings in shambling villages across Eastern Europe face the visitor with an environment in stark contrast to my native Scotland, with a growing number of disused or recycled ecclesial buildings.

So Presence and Proclamation are issues. Where sermons get shorter and symbolism and sacramental signs are explored anew in Western Baptist circles,<sup>2</sup> it has been both startling and refreshing for me, on visiting Russian Baptist churches, to experience Sunday services with three or more sermons integral to a worship service lasting over two hours. Yet, in Bulgaria, it has been enlightening to realise how the language of the ancient Orthodox liturgy is so foreign and even unintelligible to ordinary people. These contrasts invite the question, 'what is central to communicating the good news of Jesus Christ'? What are the weightings and stress to be attached to Presence and Proclamation?

It is these issues of Presence and Proclamation in presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ that I would like to explore in this essay. We will first look at ways in which Presence might be construed, in seeking to constitute church and therefore Christian witness. From there, we will go on to reflect on what it means to communicate the Gospel through Proclamation.

At the outset, I would introduce a critical tool to assist us in our analysis. In examining Presence and Proclamation, we will test fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ disclosed<sup>3</sup> and entrusted to<sup>4</sup> us by God using a fourfold category formulated by IBTS rector, Keith Jones: orthodoxy,

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<sup>2</sup> See essays on *Baptist Sacramentalism* in volumes 5 (2003) and 25 (2008) in the Paternoster series, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought*.

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 1.26

<sup>4</sup> Jude 1.3

orthopraxy, orthohexy and orthopyre.<sup>5</sup> Using these categories in a broad, aspective sense, we define them as follows:

- Orthodoxy            -        right faith
- Orthopraxis        -        right practice or action
- Orthohexis        -        right attitude to others
- Orthopyre         -        right fire of the Holy Spirit of God

## Presence

Within the Orthodox mindset, truth is more than proposition. To have access to truth there must be a right relationship. To enter into Christian truth we must relate to God in a right way. So it is that ‘Orthodoxy’ can be translated not only as ‘right truth’ but also as ‘right glory’: having the right presence—the glorious presence of God Himself—among us and in us. Truth is communicated not through abstracted studies in doctrine detached from an active seeking and enjoying of the presence of God, but through observing and participating in the act of Christian worship expressed in the liturgy, the church’s corporate communion of worship in fellowship with God.<sup>6</sup> It is in and through our relating to God in this way, in ways established by God Himself, that we are faced with the truth of God in the rite of worship. Truth arises from and is a predicate of the presence of God entered into by us, on God’s terms. It is for this reason that we can see that the church is more than an institution: it is ‘an organism, almost a living entity’.<sup>7</sup> The use of sacred space is important in awakening the worshipper to awareness of God: the icons as windows and the liturgy celebrated by the clergy drawing us to meet with God in a manner put into place by God, not simply chosen by ourselves. Because it is the Presence of God that brings truth, what matters most is our entering communion with Him. More specifically, what matters is communion with Him in His Triune reality, met with and expressed within the liturgy. In this sense, to be the church at worship is to bring Christian witness into the world; for there is God’s Presence confronting us. As Israel knew the glory of God manifest on Mount Sinai, in the Tabernacle and in the Temple, so the church knows God, as communion with the Triune God is entered and experienced through participation in the liturgy.

<sup>5</sup> *Dictionary Of European Baptist Life and Thought* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), page 371. Jones is not the originator of these terms, but can be credited for bringing them together in this aspective and complementary way.

<sup>6</sup> Represented so well in the title of Metropolitan John of Pergamon’s 1985 seminal interpretation of Orthodox Eucharistic theology: John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Tim Grass, “Orthodoxy and the Doctrine of the Church,” in Ian M Randall (Edit.), *Baptists and the Orthodox Church* (Prague: IBTS, 2003), p. 6.

This emphasis on communion with God, entered and experienced in and through God's self manifestation, is not entirely foreign to Western thought. The translation into English of the title of Eberhard Jungel's study of Swiss theologian Karl Barth's Trinitarian Theology, *God's Being Is In Becoming*,<sup>8</sup> famously renders an understanding of a Triune God who looks out to embrace us in and through the self-revelation of His own Being. In more recent times, the distinguished Baptist scholar, Paul Fiddes, explicates a pastoral theology of communing with the Triune God in his influential work, *Participating in God*.<sup>9</sup> There is, though, a difference in Baptist and Orthodox approaches.

Baptist soteriology has, generally speaking, continued to retain a crucicentric focus, emphasising that justification comes through Christ's sacrifice,<sup>10</sup> inviting focus upon the crucifixion as the key event in the life of the Incarnate God's involvement in time and human history. Orthodoxy, while in no sense diminishing the importance of the Cross, has emphasised salvation as being brought to us through God drawing us into participation with Himself in and through participation with the Holy Trinity, facilitated through all of the Incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Consequently, it is our present communion with the Risen Christ, and our exposure to the divine energies that flow into our lives from the Holy Trinity, that sanctifies us and saves us, through our being made participators of the divine nature: the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis*.<sup>11</sup>

Wherein, then, lies the problem, if there is one? It could be said to be a matter of emphasis. The development of Orthodox theology, albeit rooted in the Scriptures and nurtured through an encultured Byzantine paradigm, carved out an apologetic within the vocabulary and thought forms of Greek philosophical thought. It was dominantly Platonic and dualistic, separating the Uncreated God and perfection from Creation and the imperfect. Hence communion with God was translated into a focus on a transcendent God, albeit made immanent to us through mediating agencies or energies. God who has visited with us in Jesus Christ is translated into the One who now reaches us through Presence in the church's institutions: an interpretation that was also politically convenient from the fourth century onwards, when ecclesial and political power were being welded together. In a parallel way, similar developments took place in the West. There, the focus was on the unity of God and the primacy of Rome. Here, explaining the later

<sup>8</sup> Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1976.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God* (Edinburgh: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Regardless of whether that cruciform sacrifice has been interpreted as palliative, expiatory or propitiatory.

<sup>11</sup> A doctrine which has a profound Biblical basis in 2 Peter 1.4.

development of Baptist emphases, the focus was on the event of the Cross and its efficacy, mediated through sacraments which were there shaped not as the tools of Byzantium but, through to the time of the Protestant Reformation, of an increasingly politicised Roman bishopric.

Now, how do our fourfold criteria here apply? Orthodoxy came to be tested and shaped by adherence to creeds and councils which expressed the marriage of church to empire in a politicised ecclesiology. Orthohexis came to be interpreted primarily as proper response to the power structures of the politicised ecclesiology. Orthopraxis would be measured in terms of conformity to societal norms. Orthopyre's presence would be proven through proper response to the mediating agents of both ecclesial and societal blessing.

What relevance has this for us today? At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the ecclesial marriage to the power of State has been truly broken in Western Europe and although, after the collapse of the Soviet system, there has been a measure of Orthodox renaissance in parts of Eastern Europe and Russia, the strength of post-modernity's cultural and intellectual pluralism, promoted and sustained through cultural and economic networking, promises to provide a continued impediment to any attempts to establish exclusive societal norms. But this has also provided us with broken parameters and new horizons. As when Jesus Christ called his first disciples, we are in a season of fresh opportunity, where we can attempt to refashion an understanding of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, orthohexy and orthopyre in a new and, dare we say, more biblical way; a way that takes the best features of both Eastern and Western traditions and looks to a new synthesis in Presence and Proclamation.

In this, a potent baptistic contribution arises because of the environment in which the Anabaptist heritage was forged. In the central European lands furthest removed from the powers of Rome and Byzantium, alternative ways of being church and pursuing mission were born. More specifically, where totalitarian power structures were weakened, biblical expressions of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, orthohexy and orthopyre could be freshly sought, serving as a reminder of features that were present but sometimes hidden within the more politicised forms of church that had developed in Catholic West and Orthodox East.

This can be seen in the radical, Christocentric understanding of Presence that was shaped among the Anabaptists, as they sought to discover and assert a biblical understanding of God come to us. For them, Christocentricity did not mean simply crucicentricity, as was dominant in

the Western tradition; but neither was this translated into an ecclesiocentricity vindicated by an emphasis that communion with the Triune God was present within inherited traditions and structures, as could be argued of the Orthodox context. For the Anabaptists, the stress was upon a Jesus-centeredness that calls us to invest in participation with Him.

This focus upon Jesus Christ Himself is, I believe, a key element of Anabaptist theology that needs to be affirmed in modern, Christian hermeneutics. Happily, in Western theology, there is a renewed interest in emphasising the Trinitarian nature of communion with God; and one of the benefits of this is that it brings Western thought into fresh dialogue with Orthodox theology. What is critical in this process, however, is that we grasp that the key to predicating and engaging in Trinitarian communion with God from a baptistic perspective is Jesus Christ Himself.

This point is, of course, implicitly central to the rich traditions of Orthodoxy. The Eucharistic focus; the physical depiction of Christ-Ruler-over-all in the basilica, looking over the meeting of priests with laity within the sacred space; the invocation of the Holy Spirit to come upon the congregation at the celebration of Christ's reception by the people: all of this emphasises that the point of meeting of God with His people and the predicating of all Trinitarian theology arises from our recognition and reception of the Presence of God come to us in and through Jesus Christ and in Him alone. It was precisely this primitive Christocentric emphasis, implicitly central to Orthodox ecclesial practice, which was rediscovered in a fresh way by the Anabaptists of central Europe. Breaking out from the politicised ecclesial structures that for them had come to obscure Christ, they found in their meetings and worship practice a new way of celebrating Christocentricity. The gathering of church came to be, for them, a celebration of Jesus Christ Himself. Orthodoxy was affirmed not simply in the recognition of what Christ had done for us, but in a collective and shared owning of Christ's sense of purpose and pursuit of God's will. Orthopraxy was to be worked out in the ethical actions of believers. Orthodoxy was to be founded in the way that Christians related to one another and, indeed to others beyond the ecclesial community. Orthopyre was to be vindicated in the way that God's presence was evident through the realisation and enactment of all these convictions.

Is it possible that baptistic Christians, in rediscovering roots in this late medieval renaissance of Christocentricity, can better rediscover further aspects of Christocentricity through studying and learning from Orthodox theology's implicit affirmation of it? If so, we must further develop this line of study. We need to go on to work out how baptistic theology,



phrased in the vocabulary of the West, can, in the twenty-first century, better represent Christocentricity. The leading North American Baptist scholar Stanley Grenz wrote of this shortly before his death. By rooting our identity so forcefully in Christ and Christ alone, he recognised that early Christian writers expressed ‘the biblical declaration that human beings are created in the image of God’.<sup>12</sup> He goes on,

Contemporary Orthodox theologian Panayiotis Nellas explains that deification actually entails Christification. This concept, he argues, is not to be limited to the kind of ‘external imitation’ of Christ that involves merely ‘ethical improvement’. Rather, Christification is to be understood in the ontological sense indicated by the declaration of Maximus the Confessor: ‘God the divine logos wishes to effect the mystery of His incarnation always and in all things’.<sup>13</sup>

This emphasis on Christocentricity as involving Christomorphism—being shaped into the very likeness of Christ—so important to the Anabaptists, can provide us with a key both for developing our understanding of God’s Presence and in developing mission in an Orthodox context. What it means to bring expression of the Presence of God, through the Eucharistic celebration of His church, needs to be worked out in our human convictions and corporate practices. We readily acknowledge that Orthodox theology itself wrestles with this issue, as seen in the Russian notion of *sobornost*,<sup>14</sup> shaped by Khomiakov in the mid-nineteenth century, where it has been used to stress collective identity arising out of the Eucharistic celebration and joining to Christ. As has been observed, *sobornost* offers ‘a vital corrective to the equation of “freedom” with individualism’.<sup>15</sup>

It is this emphasis on a Trinitarian communion with God, where personhood is discovered and individualism countered, that echoes so well in the heart of baptistic theology. The search for a *raison d’être* for a

<sup>12</sup> Stanley J Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being : a Trinitarian theo-ontology* (Louisville: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2005), p. 365.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> As Parush Parushev points out, in coining the term Khomiakov derived it from the Slavic root *sobirat* ‘to bring together’ (helpfully the Russian term for gathering and the designation of a large cathedral – *sobor*, have the same root). ‘In Khomiakov’s view, *sobornost*’ faithfully represents the Byzantine patristic concept of “catholicity”, which meant universal unity in the legitimate diversity of all believers and the world, personified by the Church gathering (council) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. *Sobornost*’, or catholicity, conceived in this way was a category which had alike an ecclesiological, social and epistemological meaning’. (‘Walking in the Dawn of the Light: On Salvation Ethics of the Ecclesial Communities in Orthodox Tradition from a Radical Reformation Perspective’, PhD Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, June 2007, available through ProQuest, UMI No. 3260231, p. 162).

<sup>15</sup> Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff, ‘Who are the Orthodox Christians? A historical introduction’, *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, eds. Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge University Press, 2008), Cambridge Collections Online, Cambridge University Press, p.11, 04 September 2009, DOI:10.1017/CCOL9780521864848.001.

committed, corporate presence as church in the local environment, incarnate and visible among other people, is an increasing challenge to congregations both in an Orthodox context and in the West. A rediscovery of a theological rationale for church as community, declaring that it is in and through the gathering and celebration of a people united in the quest to be formed more effectively into the likeness and to be the vehicles of the Presence of the Incarnate God into the wider community, is a visionary motive for ecclesial gatherings.

The Incarnational focus of Orthodox Trinitarianism can also be a helpful corrective to Western individualism and a mistaking of tritheism for Trinitarian belief. God is not three individuals in relationship. He is revealed to us in His Triune, interpersonal relationality. Communion with God predicates not individuals, but persons in relationship. It is so easy to misplace an understanding of One God who is three Persons with a confused conception of God as three individuals come together! As three leading British Baptists have recently reminded us,

Any discussion, then, of the nature of church must begin with God. It then proceeds *not* to the individual, but to the person. By this we mean, in the words of Robert Walton, that, 'Christianity is not individualistic, it is personal', and this carries with it the relational dimension. As the triune God is personal, so is his relationship with humanity.<sup>16</sup>

Presence is hard to maintain. As Parush R. Parushev opines, *community* is an ambiguous term, including both groups brought together in the pursuit of shared virtues (thin community) and also groups that are character forming and transforming (thick communities).<sup>17</sup> But it is the development of this latter type of community that we are referring to when we refer to the necessary Presence of the church. That is, we are talking of a self-conscious community, where relationships between members bring people close enough to experience conflict and the need therefore for both repentance and forgiveness. It is the type of community envisioned by John Howard Yoder, when he declared,

<sup>16</sup> Brian Haymes, Anthony R. Cross and Ruth Gouldbourne, *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> 'Doing Theology in a Baptist Way' (Theologie op een baptistenmanier), in drs. Teun van der Leer, ed., *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 2009 in English and Dutch), 1-33. Published in Dutch in Teun van der Leer, ed., *Zo zijn onze manieren! In gesprek over gemeentetheologie*, in Batistica Reeks monograph series, volume 1 (Barneveld, the Netherlands: Unie van Baptisten Gemeenten in Nederland, 2009), pp. 7-22 and 66-74. Electronically available in English on <http://www.baptisten.nl/upload/ParushevEng.pdf> and in Dutch on <http://www.baptisten.nl/upload/ParushevNL.pdf>, last accessed on April 08 2010.

To be human is to have differences; to be human wholesomely is to process those differences, not by building up conflicting power claims but by reconciling dialogue. Conflict is socially useful; it forces us to attend to new data from new perspectives. It is useful in interpersonal process; by processing conflict, one learns skills, awareness, trust, and hope. Conflict is useful in intrapersonal dynamics, protecting our concern about guilt and acceptance from being directed inwardly only to our own feelings. The therapy for guilt is forgiveness; the source of self-esteem is another person who takes seriously my restoration to community.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, it is Christian community, seeking to replicate the purposes of Jesus Christ, that brings to us the Presence of Christian witness. Conversely, it is the failure to grasp both the facility and inevitability of conflict within the thick community that brings problems when ecclesial communities are, by and large, merely thin. As contemporary Western society becomes increasingly atomised and fragmented, it is easy to mistake 'thin' community for 'thick'. But thin communities are, by design, superficial. It is shared interest, not shared lives, that holds them together. So when conflict comes to voluntaristic, 'thin' communities, there may be little motivation in holding them together.

The future of church, and indeed, the expression of genuine, Christian witness, lies in establishing thick communities of Presence. This may be brought about by the founding of new communities, or through the transformation of existing ones. The critical issue is not one of management or structure. What matters are conviction and practice, not private virtues and opinion. We are talking of community as organism, bringing people close enough to be both formed and transformed. To be close enough in observing and sharing life that it can be said, 'I urge you to imitate me'<sup>19</sup> and 'Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith'.<sup>20</sup>

## Proclamation

I have reflected much on a comment by Emil Traytchev, Dean of the Faculty of Orthodox theology of Sofia University, in the opening address of our joint conference at IBTS on *Christian Mission in an Orthodox Context* in February 2009. He there opined that proselytisation was any attempt to win others to the Gospel by a means other than the Gospel. I

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<sup>18</sup> *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2001), p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 4.16.

<sup>20</sup> Hebrews 13.7.

very much appreciate this perspective. It has drawn me to question further the relationship of Presence to Proclamation, an issue that is especially important in seeking to freshly state core Baptist convictions, stressing Christ-centred mission that seeks to draw people into a discipleship contextualised in a gathering community.<sup>21</sup> In the second part of this essay, we now proceed to explore this connection between Presence and Proclamation.

At the outset, we are faced with a challenge. Given the importance we have attached to Presence, can a communication of the Gospel ever be detached from the Presence of a necessary paradigm of Gathering Community, the local church? Can we claim that we are truly engaging in evangelism, if we are not at the same time demonstrating, through Presence, the nature of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, orthohexy and orthopyre?

So far, in our reflection on the importance of Presence to the Orthodox context, we have been reminded that the Gospel of the Kingdom of God has come through the Incarnate Christ. Our understanding is that the Christian Gospel is the Good News that the Kingdom of God has come to us in and through Jesus Christ. Our celebration of Him, in Eucharistic assembly, is our celebration of this truth. Without the coming of God's self-disclosure into the world there is no Gospel to celebrate. Moreover, we have been reminded that an integral part of that disclosure belongs to the church as occupying physical space, the tangible community of those who are embarked on a journey of transformation, God working out His salvation in and through our lives. For can there be a proper declaration and demonstration of the Gospel without the physical manifestation of church?

The Gospel that Jesus Christ proclaimed was that of the Kingdom of God, the Good News of the Kingdom. This message became the post-Pentecost Proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ when it became evident that Jesus Christ had, through His life, death and Resurrection, established among and through His disciples the presence, power and purposefulness of the Kingdom of God in the world. For me personally, as one converted within the context of both Evangelicalism and the Charismatic Renewal of the 1970's, this has been a critically liberating and

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<sup>21</sup> Keith G Jones lays out the basis of a triadic description of baptistic convictions in *A Believing Church: Learning from Some Contemporary Baptist and Anabaptist Perspectives* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1998), pp. 53-54. There he speaks of engaging Scripture with a Christocentric hermeneutic, leading us into the body of Christ as a Gathering Church, 'committed to developing a lifestyle and mission which engages credibly with the surrounding world', (p. 54). The terms 'gathering church' and 'community of disciples' are taken up and further developed by Nigel Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), p. 51.

enabling realisation. But it is more than I was presented when I began the path of discipleship.

A simple evangelical message, presented to me as a new convert, was that as a sinner I had to open my life to Jesus as Saviour and Lord. And this I did. Furthermore, I was confronted with the Charismatic message that I needed to open my life to be filled with the Spirit of God. And this also I did. But what I now realise was absent from the Proclamation presented to me was any sense of substantive content to the Good News of the Kingdom of God, other than it involved opening my life to Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and believing in the Bible.

I now look back at ‘street evangelism’ forays, when groups went out to engage people in discussions and later gathered to celebrate ‘how many decisions’ had been made and counted. I think of attempts in evangelism without any real sense of critical need to continue to draw people into engagement with the community of faith in discipleship. Yes, converts were indeed made. But what were they converted to? Likewise, I am troubled at how easily ecstatic experience or a sense of noumenal immediacy could be, and still is in some quarters, accepted as indicative of the Holy Spirit’s baptising or infilling presence. Critical evaluators of orthopyre are few. This seems to be both naïve and even dangerous. I recall a close friend, leader of a Christian Fellowship, recently reporting how his adult Christian children had expressed their consternation at how experiences of ecstatic joy and existential awakening at a secular pop concert seemed indistinguishable, in sensory experience, to their awareness of God’s presence in Charismatic worship events. How to resolve such confusion?

Stassen and Gushee’s important work, *Kingdom Ethics*, has provided an important contribution in moving forward in this process. There, seven indicators of the Kingdom of God are plainly offered: deliverance, righteousness/justice, peace, joy, God’s presence as Spirit or Light, healing, return from exile.<sup>22</sup> All seven are indicators, present in the Messianic anticipation of Isaiah’s prophecy, as seen to be realised in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Now, for the purposes of our analysis, two features of these seven indicators are especially important. First of all, collectively they provide us with both Theocentric and Christocentric indicators: they are not intuitively subjective or anthropocentric. They look to the Presence of God come among us. Secondly, they appear to overlay

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<sup>22</sup>Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), p. 25.

with our four aspects laid out by Jones. Generally, we might observe this overlap as follows:

<b>Stassen &amp; Gushee</b>	<b>Jones</b>
Deliverance	orthohexy / orthopraxy
Righteousness / justice	orthohexy / orthopraxy
Peace	orthopyre
Joy	orthopyre
God's presence as Spirit or Light	orthodoxy
Healing	orthopyre / orthohexy / orthopraxy
Return from Exile	orthodoxy

This is not to say that others have failed to identify similar indicators of the Kingdom.<sup>23</sup> Yet Stassen and Gushee's clear classification allows us to ask the question, 'Where do we find an answer to the question, "where are the indicators of the Kingdom of God realised?"'; and then proceed to a substantive answer: 'in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ of Nazareth'. Stassen and Gushee allow us to extrapolate, from both our social context and the context of the Confession Community of Israel, a question; and then to go forward to see, in the witness of the New Testament and also in the convictions and practices of contemporary church, an answer.

Or does it? If we have identified both a question and a sufficient answer, can I now engage in Proclamation? Indeed, 'Jesus is the Answer!' But can we rightfully present Him as the answer unless we have first invited people to ask the relevant question, seeking to establish community wherein they may be led towards finding an authentic expression of that answer?

I recall one Advent Season, finding myself with my congregation's evangelistic team in a Scottish shopping mall, dressed as a clown and handing out helium filled balloons inscribed with the message, 'Celebrate the King's Birthday!' As a mother with tearful twins was complaining that I had only one balloon left to offer her two competing children, I do confess to asking myself, 'Am I getting the people to ask the right question'? This seems to me to be the problem with much so-called Proclamation. Whether we occupy the evangelically ecclesial high ground and see ourselves fulfilling the mandate to make disciples, through

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<sup>23</sup> For instance, Andrew M. Lord identifies seven indicators of mission that brings a foretaste of the Kingdom: (i) people acknowledging Jesus as Lord; (ii) healing; (iii) justice; (iv) unity in diversity; (v) creation set free; (vi) praise and worship; and (vii) love and fellowship (in 'Mission Eschatology: A Framework for Mission in the Spirit', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 11 (October 1997): pp. 111-112).

declaring the eternal verities of Scripture from our pulpits Sunday by Sunday, or understand ourselves to be at the sharp end of cultural relevancy in handing out coffee and croissants before or after our Sunday celebrations, there is a great danger that we miss the mark altogether.

The abiding popularity of measuring Proclamation's success by such indicators as numbers filling seats at Sunday events or the balance of funds in church bank accounts suggests to me both a failure to grasp, in much continuing Western mission practice, what it means to invite either valid questions or provide proper answers as to the meaning and value of life in the name of Jesus Christ. Conversely, where we have a confident grasp of the substantive content of the Gospel, we will discover a renewed confidence in emphasising the 'drivers' of the Kingdom of God and not simply looking for indicators of results that are of questionable value in assessing our fidelity to the Kingdom of God, let alone measures of Biblical faithfulness.

## Drivers of the Kingdom

We are constrained to link Proclamation and Presence. We must, indeed, go further and declare that there can be no legitimate Proclamation unless there is authentic Presence. But now the question is not, 'how best can we Proclaim it?' or even, 'what should we Proclaim?' Now we have an anterior question to ask: 'What is our motivation for Proclamation'? In the concluding section of this essay, I want to outline and develop an understanding of three drivers of the convictions that motivate and shape our Proclamation.

I would suggest three Drivers of the Kingdom that provide proper motive in pursuing Presence and Proclamation in Mission. These drivers are derived from three, central convictions of baptistic witness formulated by Keith Jones, who has already linked these in part to orthodoxy, orthopraxy, orthohexy and orthopyre, our four aspective indicators of baptistic witness.<sup>24</sup> How can these be further developed and applied within an Orthodox context?

Jones' emphasis is not simply on a Christocentric hermeneutic, but on the development of an ecclesiology and Christian ethic arising out of our participation in Christ. His conviction is that this should lead us into a gathering model of church that will enable people for radical discipleship.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the drivers for a baptistic model of church are

<sup>24</sup> *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Volume 4:2 (January 2004), pp. 5-13.

<sup>25</sup> Or, as Alan Kreider puts it in his forward, to an approach that is "Christocentric, corporate and practical" in Jones, *A Believing Church*, p xv.

Christocentricity, Gathering Church and Radical Discipleship. I would suggest that we can usefully invoke this triad of drivers of the Kingdom—Christocentricity, Gathering Church and Radical Discipleship—in a way that can help us establish a legitimate model for Presence and Proclamation, preserving proper orthodoxy, orthopraxy, orthohexy and orthopyre.

As we have seen, the Orthodox context requires us to take Incarnational reality and Christological focus seriously. If Baptists have stressed the importance of the propositional dimension of orthodoxy, it has been because they feel they have sensed, within the Orthodox context, a weakness in the explication of the truth of God's glory; often simply because they have not seen evidence that orthodoxy is being communicated through the liturgy in ways that the people can understand. This is a proper challenge to the Orthodox. But it is now also a challenge to the Baptists! Cultural movements in the West and the challenge of post-foundationalism have caused many Baptists to ask how it is that we can better communicate an orthodox Christian message that alerts us to the reality of a world brought into being by, for and through the Incarnate Word of God.

It is here that Baptists have something to learn from the Orthodox, who rightly emphasise that the key to understanding life and its meaning comes through the physical Presence of the Incarnate Christ. There can be no Gospel of the Kingdom without the Incarnate Presence of the King, met within and through the community that gathers in His name. On this the Orthodox are at one with advocates of baptistic theology. The challenge is how to do it!

I would suggest that the key to developing these three Drivers of the Kingdom - Christocentricity, Gathering Church and Radical Discipleship—in a manner that preserves and promotes orthodoxy, orthopraxy, orthohexy and orthopyre, lies in looking to promote Stassen and Gushee's seven indicators of the Kingdom of God and that this may be done by self-consciously emphasising two paths that are well known in an Orthodox context, but also important to baptistic believers. These are the paths of *kenosis* and *anastasis*.

As the North American baptistic theologian James W. McClendon has stressed<sup>26</sup>, a proper understanding of *kenosis*—Christ's self-emptying, as spoken of in the Greek original of the Philippian hymn<sup>27</sup>---is not simply a question of Patristic Christological debate.<sup>28</sup> It calls us to identify with the

<sup>26</sup> *Systematic Theology: Doctrine. Volume II* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 267-268.

<sup>27</sup> Philippians 2.7.

<sup>28</sup> Kenotic theology was powerfully advocated by the great Congregationalist theologian, P.T. Forsyth. He believed that a proper self-emptying led to the expression of 'holy love'. See Leslie McCurdy, *Attributes and Atonement: the holy love of God in the theology of P.T. Forsyth* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999).



self-emptying that Christ entered into for us. It draws us into understanding faith less in terms of bare belief and more as positive participation in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. It is here that an understanding of kenosis in baptistic theology, rooted in the understanding of radical discipleship that the Anabaptists of central Europe brought to our tradition, needs to be continued to be researched, understood and applied today by those who lay claim to identifying with this heritage of faith.

Kenosis is a vital key to pursuing the drivers of Christocentricity and Gathering Community, creating the Presence of the thick communities that are needed to authenticate our Proclamation. How can I grow as a Christian if there are none to abase myself in service to or humble myself before? Unless I am caught up in a life of self-emptying, service and obedience, how can I truly represent the reality of Jesus Christ to others? I need the help of community in developing a witness that faces the challenge of being Christocentric and seeks to express what that means in practice.

Anastasis is the proper and necessary corollary to kenosis. It is the act of resurrection in and through Jesus Christ, and the power of being lifted up and made alive in Him through the Holy Spirit. Where Christ was brought low, it was the anastatic power of the Spirit of God that enabled Him and raised Him up. So too in us. Here orthodoxy is manifest, orthopyre realised, orthohexis encouraged and orthopraxis enabled. The wind of the Spirit, coming down upon us in the fire of God and rising within us as living water, is looked for in invocation of the Holy Spirit central to the great liturgies of the church. This is what we need, that the church be enabled to live in a manner of radical discipleship that enables our Proclamation to make sense to those around us so that others may come to know and worship Christ the King.

Kenosis and Anastasis are not merely liturgical concepts. They predicate a Christocentricity, Gathering Church and Radical Discipleship that leads us into the pursuit of deliverance, righteousness/justice, peace, joy, God's presence as Spirit or Light, healing and return from exile. They declare that a life pursued in the name of Jesus can expect and look for vindication in the name of Jesus. They are the keys to having orthodoxy, orthopraxy, orthohexy and orthopyre and fidelity to Christ represented through our Presence and Proclamation, Baptist and Orthodox alike.

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